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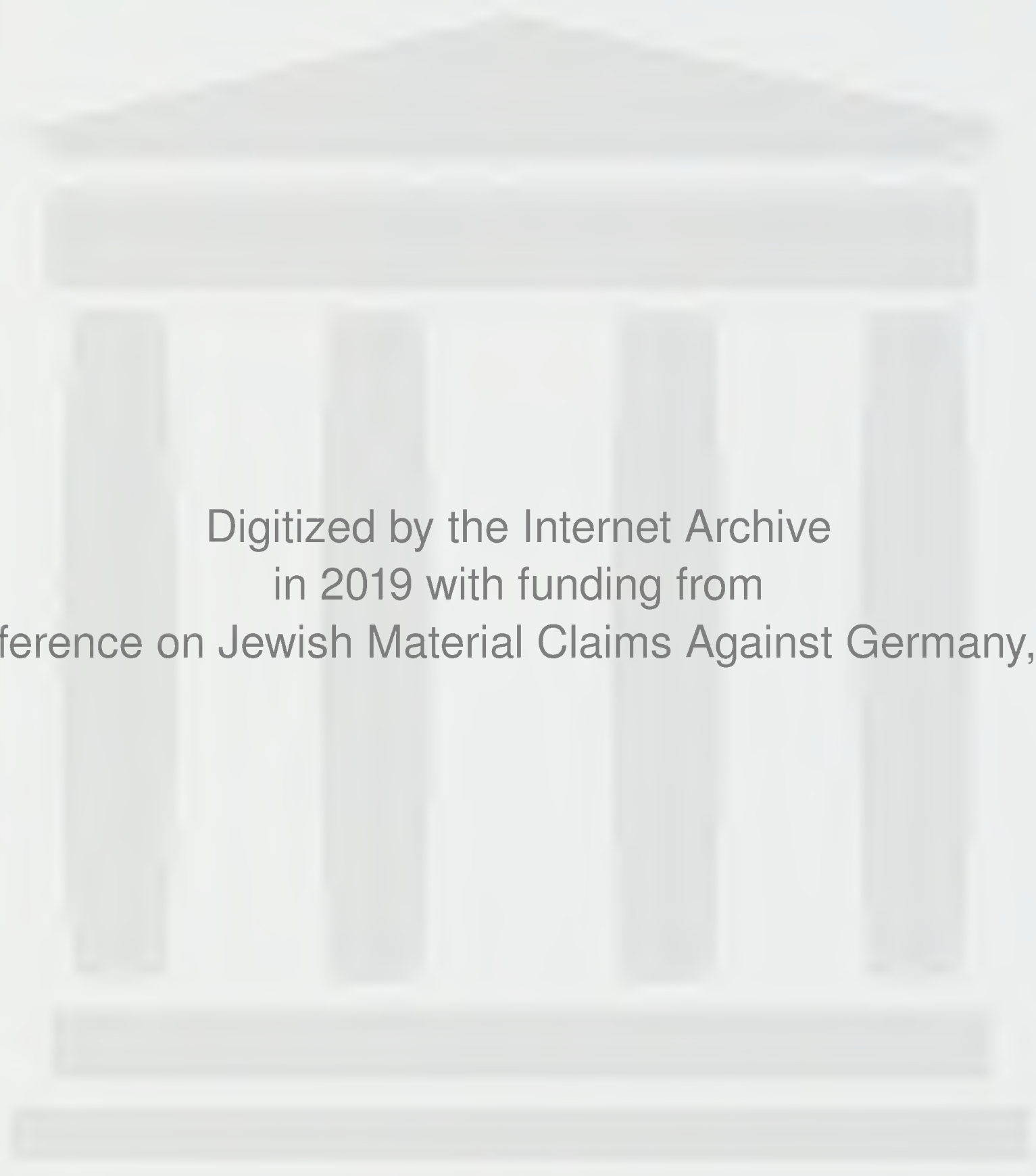
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I CAME BACK

A Holocaust Survival Story

By Agnes Greenfield

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To my grandchildren:

Yaakov Zev

Menachem Yisroel

Aryeh Leib

Amanda (Chava Rochel)

Bracha Esther

And to their future generations.

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In memory of

My mother, Anna Grunberg Kupferstein (1901-1944)

My father, Izidor Kupfersein (1900-1944)

My sister, Eva (1929-1944)

My brother, Otto (1930-1944)

Who perished in Auschwitz.

Whom I have missed so much throughout my life.



My father



Krupferstein Rinberg Anna

My mother



My younger sister Eva, performing as Queen Esther in a
Passover play put on by the Jewish elementary school she attended. 1938



*My younger brother Otto, when he was about nine
years old.*

PROLOGUE

After the liberation from the death camps of Nazi Germany, we who survived did not want to talk about our horrible experiences. We wanted to forget, and we also saw that people were bored, uninterested in our stories. Some survivors would have preferred to keep it a secret that they had been in a concentration-camp, because having been a concentration-camp inmate had a stigma attached to it. For many years the survivors kept silent. It was my sixty-fifth birthday, when the thought that I would leave this world without having told the story of my survival began to bother me. I wanted my children, grandchildren, and their future generations to know their roots, to know where they came from, to have some knowledge of their ancestors. And I wanted them to know how I survived the Holocaust. But how do I start writing my memoir? How do I describe the indescribable? How do I describe the horrors in English, a language which is not my spoken tongue, a language which I don't fully command? I needed help. I was very fortunate to find the help of my daughter-in-law, Rena. She patiently worked with me for countless hours, correcting the grammar and spelling mistakes, and the "not English" sounding sentences, which reappeared time and again.

Thank you Rena, for your patience and understanding. I could not have accomplished this memoir without your help!

I give thanks to the Almighty for letting me come back, and giving me and Tuli, my husband, our precious family.

Agnes Greenfeld.

PREFACE

It is May 8, 1945.

I am a prisoner in a German slave labor camp for Jewish girls, close to the small town of Bad-Kudova. It is mid-morning and we are called for "Chale Appell" (Roll Call). This is not the ordinary routine since we already stood for "Chale Appell" before dawn, at four o'clock, just as we had every morning from the day we were deported to Auschwitz. We have already received the bowl of black coffee and our ration of bread for the day, a quarter of a small loaf, which by now most of us have eaten. It is a beautiful spring morning. The air is mild; the sun is illuminating the clear blue sky above us. But for me, for us prisoners, the world is dark. Although rumors have been circulating lately that Hitler had committed suicide, that the war is coming to an end, I am unable to hope anymore that this slavery could ever end, that I could ever be free. I am constantly, painfully hungry. Hunger has taken over all my thoughts, all my mind. Freedom and life without hunger have become unfamiliar to me. The war will be over, I tell myself, but the Germans will never let us go. They won't have to account for us because there is no one left alive from our families who will look for us. We will stay here until we die from starvation.

The Lager Elteste, a Jewish girl, Rita, is in charge. She counts us and then she calls the Kommandant, the highest German officer of the Lager. Usually, the Kommandant would count us again, as was the regimen every morning and every evening, but today, she starts talking to us. In the next few minutes, I find myself listening to her telling us that the war is over, that soon the gates will be open and we will be free to leave.

I understand the words. German was one of the foreign languages required to be studied in the Gymnasium, the school I used to attend in my hometown, Nyiregyhaza, in Hungary. The Kommandant, still dressed in the dreaded SS (Nazi) uniform, for Jews the symbol of the most powerful, invincible evil, and unimaginable horror and suffering, announces the end of the Germans' horrific atrocities with only a few simple words. She casually announces in a voice devoid of emotion that we are free, as if nothing dreadful had happened, as if we could each return home to our families and pick up our lives as we had left them.

"March to the kitchen barrack," the Kommandant continues, "and the bread and leftover staples will be distributed among you." This is the instant that I realize: I survived the Lager!

Do we start celebrating, singing, dancing and jumping for joy? Do we storm into the kitchen in our excruciating hunger? In our deep hatred towards the Germans for our sufferings, for their atrocities, do we try to attack the Kommandant? No, we do none of this. We are too broken in spirit, and indoctrinated with the might of the Germans to do such things. In somber and orderly fashion, we line up in front of the kitchen. Each of us receives a whole bread. My soup bowl is filled with sugar and some type of shortening. I take my spoon and quickly mix them into a delicious cream, and start licking it with my finger. I lick it very slowly. I want this sweet delicacy to last for a long time.

We don't go back to the barracks. We have been carrying our precious and only belongings, our soup bowl and our spoon, with us all the time. We learned to guard these very carefully; our lives depended on them.

We leave the camp in formation, five in a row, which had become our way of life from the moment we arrived in Auschwitz. When we march through the gates to freedom, the only joy I feel is the sweet taste on my lips as I lick the cream off my fingers.

Today, I feel a need, an obligation, to be among those who bear witness to how our people and my family suffered and died during the Nazi terror. As I am getting older, I realize more and more how fast the years are passing by. Soon, all who survived the horrors of the Nazis will be gone. There won't be eyewitnesses left who can teach our children and their children, firsthand, about this terribly dark period of our Jewish history. I feel we must pass on to future generations how one mad man, Hitler, with his collaborators, devised the "Final Solution to the Jewish Problem". How they took it upon themselves to exterminate the European Jewry, to make them and their culture disappear forever from the face of this earth. In the Nazis' mad determination that not one drop of Jewish blood should survive, Christians who were born of mixed marriages, people whose Jewish ancestors had long before converted to Christianity, and rejected or never knew that one of their ancestors had been Jewish, were now considered to be Jews, and were persecuted. In our minds, Hitler waged World War II for one reason: To annihilate the Jews of Europe.

In Germany and in the European countries that Hitler had invaded, the Jews shared a common fate. It started with the enforcement of oppressive laws against the Jews. Next, the Jews were driven out

of their homes, and concentrated into ghettos. The persecution culminated in deportations, tortures and killings. But the different circumstances, the varying degrees of torture, and whether one survived it or not, were a matter of random luck.

I believe that if our grandchildren and their succeeding generations learn about the Holocaust from the words of their own grandparents, it won't be just a distant tragedy for them. It will be more real to them than if they read the impersonal dry facts in history books. They will hear about the Holocaust from an ancestor who experienced it, who survived it by mere luck, came back, and was able to tell about it.

I shall attempt to find words which would adequately describe our misery, our despair. I shall try to put into words how it is to be mentally tormented, living with constant absolute terror of unimaginable torture, and what it's like to fear for our lives and for the lives of our families day after day, every hour, every minute of our existence. But will I find the words to describe all this, and will I be able to describe what it was like to be in Auschwitz?

Auschwitz was a place set up by the Nazi German government to torture and systematically kill human beings. People - the vast majority of them Jews - were worked and starved to death. But it was the Jews, millions of them, whom the Nazis killed by means of modern technology. They were gassed in gas-chambers, hundreds at a time, my family among them. Their bodies were burned in specially set up ovens. They disappeared without a trace, in the flames and ashes.

In Auschwitz, the SS created a system, selecting the most brutal individuals from their victims - Jews and non-Jews alike - to carry out their orders. They were put in command over their fellow prisoners. The prisoners with power, hardened from being captive in the camp for two or three years,

became uncivilized. Hoping to keep their positions and in that way save their lives, they performed their jobs with the most inhumane cruelty and brutality.(There were some exceptions.)

In the first few hours in Auschwitz, the prisoners were all transformed into subhuman beings. They became "Haftlings" - strange creatures - who stopped thinking the human way or stopped thinking altogether.

No matter how much is written about it by those who survived, the rest of the world will never comprehend. Only the ones who experienced it could really know what life was in Auschwitz.

In Auschwitz, Evil took over humans.

In memory of my mother, father, younger sister and brother, twenty-two other close family members (maternal grandparents, aunts, uncles and first cousins), and the millions of victims who perished in Auschwitz, I shall try in a small measure to contribute so that the Holocaust will not be forgotten, fade away in the past, or worse still, be denied that it ever happened.

CHAPTER ONE

The school year of 1943-44 was especially difficult and demanding for me. It was my senior year and the last year of my studies in the Gymnasium, an academic high-school. I was to graduate and receive my diploma in May, 1944, and with that, my goal of completing school would be accomplished. I had entered the Gymnasium when I was ten years old, after finishing four years in a Jewish elementary school. In the Gymnasium, an Evangelist public school for girls (there was no Jewish high-school in my hometown), classes were conducted six days a week, including Saturday. Since we were religious, Sabbath observing Jews, my parents did not want me to attend school on Saturdays. So, my father and his close friend Mr. Schreiber, the father of my classmate Edith, hired a private tutor. Edith and I were enrolled in the school but, instead of attending classes, we had special permission to study with our tutor and take an exam at the end of the school year in order to be promoted to the next grade. The exams were very difficult; in each subject three or four questions were asked from everything we had learned during the year, and our answers determined our grades.

Therefore, before each exam, it became an obsession for me to memorize all of the textbooks by heart, page by page, line by line. And then I prayed: "Dear G-d, help me not to be asked the one question I might not remember."

This manner of private study was extremely stressful for me. All the more so because Edith was not only one of the prettiest girls in our town, but she was also exceptionally intelligent and a brilliant student. For her, study meant joy and pleasure; for me, it meant extremely hard work.

Edith excelled in every subject. While in our German and French studies I would struggle to memorize the words, Edith learned to speak the languages fluently. And she loved music. When we did our homework together, Edith would insist on having the radio on, playing classical music in the background. In the middle of solving our algebra or math problems, she would exclaim in delight, "Oh, Beethoven's 5th Symphony, Strauss's Blue Danube, Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake". We listened to Hayden's Sonatas, Frenz Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody, Bach's Fantasia and many other famous masters' works. Edith was familiar with the pieces and would hum along with all this beautiful music. I was proud to be the best friend of such an intelligent girl, but it put a lot of pressure on me. I wanted to and did keep my grades up to hers, but I wrote in my diary: "Everything that comes so easily for Edith is so difficult for me."

The year of the graduation, 1944, brought two exams for Edith and me. The one in April determined whether we had passed the eighth and final grade in the Gymnasium, and would be eligible to take the matriculation (graduation) exam. The second, in May, was the matriculation exam which I studied for day and night. My whole life revolved around school. It filled every moment of my every day. I was looking forward to this hard work ending soon, but I also had very strong and mixed emotions about the prospect of my studies concluding, my life as a student coming to an end.

A chapter of my life was closing. I had been taking lessons in short-hand and typing besides for the required subjects, but still, my studies were for education only, and not for the purpose of pursuing a career. The summer will be nice, and relaxing, but come fall and what then? What will I do with all my free time? Since I was studying privately, my only close friend was Edith and she was planning to leave for Budapest to attend one of the Universities. I was worried that a very boring life was now ahead of me. I would miss Edith a lot because besides for being a very studious girl, she was also a lot of fun to be with. At her house, everything was very formal, including tea-time in the afternoon when while we did our homework, delicious small pastries and petit-fours baked by Mrs. Schreiber were served. But when Edith came over to us, it was fun time. She loved my mother's warm personality, she loved my younger sister Evi, who was extremely bright, and she loved the casual atmosphere in our home. In the early summer, our favorite pastime was climbing up our fruit trees - apple, peach, pear and plum - and eating the half-ripe fruits until our stomachs hurt!

I was almost eighteen. My mind, my whole being was filled with so many emotions. I was preoccupied in my own world - my studies, my private thoughts. My dreams and worries were the usual ones of a young girl of my age. I used to day-dream about getting married when I was seventeen just like my cousin Ilonka had, but here I was, almost eighteen, and had not even started dating. And so, although I was aware of the steadily worsening Jewish situation, it was not my first concern.

I had heard on the radio Hitler's shrieking, rabble-rousing, vitriolic speeches against the Jews. I had heard that in Slovakia Jewish girls had been taken away from their homes, from their families. I had heard about the Polish ghettos, but those were horrors happening in other countries, and to me, those were faraway places.

For years now, Hitler's terror had reigned in Europe. As he marched his victorious troops into one country after the other, the fate of the Jews in those countries became doomed. With the German annexation of Austria (Hungary's neighbor to the west) in March 1938, and the German Army invading Poland (Hungary's neighbor to the north-east) on September 1, 1939, this terror came horrifyingly close to Hungary. However, since Hitler had considered Hungary his ally, he did not yet feel the need to occupy it. So, the Hungarian Jews, while living in fear under many restrictive anti-Semitic laws, imposed by the Hungarian government under orders from Hitler, continued to live more or less normal lives. Our family, along with the other Jewish families, carried on with our usual activities; our father tended to the business, our mother to the household. We went to school, to the movies, for vacations in the summer. On winter afternoons, we went ice-skating, when Evi and I would wear our special ice-skating outfits; velvet dresses, trimmed with white fur at the neckline, sleeves, and at the hemline of the flared short skirt.

I particularly liked the month of December. Crisp white snow covered the city, and the store windows were colorful and full of merchandise during the Christmas season. I loved to spend time in front of the display window of the Schtummer Chocolate Store, in which there were electric toy trains transporting heaps of colorfully wrapped candies. The city was festive. We celebrated Hanukah and lit the Menorah albeit behind drawn curtains and closed doors. But Christmas Eve was always terrifying for us Jews. We stayed in our houses, turned off the lights and locked our gates. Still, the thugs would bang on the windows of Jewish homes (luckily our windows were higher than they could reach), and shake the doors at the gates, filling us with terror that they would break in. And, this was our so called "normal life".

In the winter of 1942, the great Russian offensive changed the course of the war. The Germans started to suffer defeats both on the Eastern front from the Red Army and on the West from the Allied forces. When the Allies reached southern and central Italy their planes were able to fly over Hungary in a matter of hours. Thus, the aerial bombardment of some Hungarian cities began. Now Hitler, feeling threatened that Hungary, in an attempt to save itself, might become neutral or would join forces with the Allies, deployed his troops into Hungary on March 19, 1944.

Their first and immediate action was to start clearing the country of Jews, with the eager and most enthusiastic help of the Hungarian Gentile population. Without the assistance in Jew hunting by the local population, be it in Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, or in other countries of Europe, the Nazis could never have recognized, rounded up and killed as many Jews as they did.

With the German occupation of Hungary, laws concerning the Jews started to appear daily with increasingly more restrictions. Jewish businesses had to be closed, our valuables had to be turned in, telephones in Jewish homes were disconnected, and all travel was forbidden. Within days, we were ordered to wear a yellow star, with the word "Jude" on it. We became busy sewing those stars onto our clothes, which would from here on brand us as Jews. There was no more laughter, smiling faces or small talk among us. Fear swept through the Jewish community. It felt as if terrible thunderclouds were gathering, and there was nowhere we could hide from the devastating coming storm. In our naivete, or perhaps because of our helplessness, we wrapped ourselves in false hope that somehow we would weather out this storm. I continued to work very hard on my studies, as I still wanted to have good grades.

Life for the Jews worsened by the day. In the surrounding smaller towns and villages the Jewish population was rounded up in the middle of April and were herded into our city. They piled the meager possessions that they could gather together in a hurry on horse-drawn carriages, and the old and sick set on top of their belongings. I saw men, pregnant women, women with babies in their arms, and children tugging their mothers' skirts marching in unending lines in front of our windows.

The Hungarian authorities designated a few streets, where most of the Jews lived, to be the ghetto, and jammed these people into the houses. Each family - grandparents, parents, and children - were allowed only one room. My family, and Jews who lived in other parts of the city, still remained in their homes.

The month of May arrived and the matriculation exams were approaching. I was still nervous and worried about it. I would get up each morning in the early dawn and go to our garden to study, just as I had done every year in the spring before the year-end exams. It was so peaceful there. Spring, that beautiful time of the year! The birds were singing, the trees and flowers - of which we had so many - were blossoming. The scent of the budding lilac tree, my mother's favorite, sweetened the air. Our garden seemed like a small paradise. I walked up and down the narrow pathways between the many flower beds, reading and memorizing the textbooks. Nothing here reminded me of the outside world, the world which was raging with fire and hate. To me, that world gone mad existed only on the other side of our gated home.

Today, I cannot understand why it was still so important for me, for Jewish students, to graduate, to work hard to achieve excellent grades. Did we refuse to realize what was happening to us? Did we

not want to see that our days were numbered, that we were sentenced to die? Did we hope that, by denying the reality, it would not happen, it would go away? Who can explain?

One late night, working on homework, I saw through the window my father and my older brother, Ervin, digging a huge hole in the garden. I heard my mother in the other room packing some of our valuables. Later, I saw my father and my brother dragging a wooden trunk to the garden and burying it in the ground. I kept on studying. (None of the valuables buried in the garden by my father and brother were found after the war.)

I remember my father listening on the radio to the Hungarian program of the BBC news reports, broadcast from London, England. He did it under great danger since it was against the law to listen to foreign broadcasts. He turned the volume of the radio down so low he had to press his ear to the speaker in order to be able to hear it. This was what he did all day long in those last few weeks.

When I think of my father, the first thought that comes to my mind is the deep love he felt for my mother. How he adored her! He would constantly remind us children, "You are so lucky to have the best, most giving mother in this whole world. She lives her life only for you, for your well being", he used to tell us. My father would write us long letters at the times Ervin and I were away from home in school, and when we, along with Evi, my younger sister, and Otto, my younger brother, were on our yearly summer vacations at our grandparents. The pages of the letters were filled with praises of our mother; how we should always appreciate her, love her, and respect her, because she so deserves it. Our mother was a beautiful person, charitable, caring and compassionate. Everyone who knew her loved her and called her "Annuska", the affectionate way to pronounce her name, Anna.

A couple of my father's beautiful letters and some family pictures have made it through the war. Ervin found them scattered among the rubbish in the basement of our home. We still have them and cherish them today.

I also remember my father as a very loving, devoted son, who had the highest respect for his parents. His mother, Fannie Ernst, came from a Hungarian Jewish family who lived in the western part of the country - the part close to Austria - going back many generations. My grandmother's father, Karl Ernest married Eva Papa after his first wife passed away. My grandmother Fannie was the only child of that second marriage. She was a very pretty girl, and was pampered by her parents, and later by her husband, my grandfather.

My paternal grandfather, Herman Kupferstein, had been a well to do landowner in his younger years. Bad luck caused him to lose his land, and when the children were grown and had their own families he and my grandmother immigrated to America. But the difficulties they encountered financially, and the longing they felt for their children (one daughter and three sons) made them return to Hungary. From then on, my grandfather worked for a nobleman, managing his estates and his vineyards in the region of Tokay. The most well known wine of Hungary, the Tokay wine, was produced from the grapes of these vineyards. My grandparents were provided with servants and a comfortable home, surrounded by many acres of beautiful vineyards. A few years later, when my grandfather became ill, they moved to our city. They were not well off financially, but my grandfather was one of the most respected men in our Jewish community. He was well educated, and people from all walks of life came to seek his wisdom and his practical advice because of his broad knowledge both in Jewish and secular matters.

The years from which I remember my grandfather the most were when he was already very sick. He suffered from colon cancer for years and went through numerous surgeries, but on my many visits to him, I never heard him complain. My father would stop to see him twice daily, in the morning and evening on his way to and from his business, the lumberyard. Although there was a nurse to help my grandfather, it was my father, who, with the utmost tenderness, would change the dressing on his father's aching body, which was ravaged by painful sores.

My grandfather was a worldly, yet deeply religious man, whose love for G-d and trust in Him was unshakable even in the midst of the most excruciating pain. One day I overheard my father recounting to my mother a conversation he had that morning in which my grandfather said, "Last night, the Satan visited me. He was seeking to persuade me to denounce G-d for the pain He inflicted upon me." My grandfather quoted to my father the arguments he used all night long to oppose the Satan. "It was already morning when he (the Satan) saw that he can not convince me, so he left me", my grandfather concluded. He died shortly after that. At his funeral, my father, along with his two brothers and others from the community, carried his casket on their shoulders, all the way to the cemetery outside the city. Hundreds of people followed them. My grandmother was lost without my grandfather. She died a few years later.

CHAPTER TWO

I mentioned earlier that my father spent the weeks before the deportation listening constantly to foreign broadcasts on the radio. The news from abroad was favorable to the Jews, as it was clear that the Germans were on the course of losing the war, and my father was very hopeful that the end of the war was not too far away. However, he did not want to discuss the Jewish situation with us children. He wanted us to concentrate all our thoughts and energies on our studies. Our education was very important to him up until the very last days. Today I cannot help but wonder whether it was my upcoming graduation that made my father delay our escape from the city until the last possible moment.

Our parents shielded us as much as they could from all the bad news. Since television was not yet invented - at least it was not yet marketed in Hungary - and since all the media was censored by the Germans, we teenagers were not fully aware of the rapidly approaching dangers.

There had been anti-Semitism in Hungary long before the German occupation. It came from the people, especially the uneducated ones. My brothers were terrified when they had to enlist in the "Levente", the paramilitary group for young boys, Gentiles and Jews alike. They had to attend three times a week after school, only to be mistreated by their abusive leaders, who came from the lower

class population. The Jewish boys were the ones who received the most beatings, not only from their leaders but also from their Gentile peers. Often my younger brother came home crying, telling my mother that he didn't want to go to the "Levente" anymore. I watched my mother hugging him, crying with him as she tried to explain that he must attend, because if not, he would get into more trouble. Mothers are always ferocious protectors of their children, but Jewish mothers could not shield their children; they had to watch helplessly as their children were being abused.

We physically experienced anti-Semitism on the streets. Young Gentile boys and girls made disparaging remarks, calling us "budos zsidó" (stinking Jews). They would often chase us, throwing stones at us as we passed on the street, while they shouted their well known hateful slogan: "Úsd a zsidót, ne sajnald" (Beat the Jews, don't feel sorry for them). And no passers-by would stop them. The stone throwing, name calling, and chasing became more frequent and more violent every year. But because the anti-Semitism, violence, and oppressive laws against the Jews were building up gradually, somehow we became conditioned to it and resigned to the fact that anti-Semitism was part of our "normal life".

After the German occupation, the hatred for the Jews exploded more violently and openly.

Still, I continued with my studies and continued to be nervous about the exams, as were all the other Jewish students. None of us were thinking: Why am I doing this? What is it good for? Today, it is hard for me to understand! Did we hope for a miracle? Did we hope that we would still have a future and we would need our education? The majority of the Jewish youth of Hungary were killed in the gas chambers less than a month after my graduation. Although they were strong and healthy, they were not selected for work in Auschwitz. The Germans, knowing that the war was lost for them, wanted to complete "The Final Solution" (the annihilation of the Jewish people) in a hurry.

The words "Final Solution," were not known to us at that time and certainly, even in our wildest nightmares, we could not have imagined the meaning of it.

The week of the matriculation exams arrived and I was worried only about my tests, as if all was right in the world, as if all was fine for the Jews, as if there wasn't anything else to worry about but my graduation. Why? I can not explain!

With the yellow star sewn onto the left side of my dress above my heart, I went to school to take the tests together with the rest of the graduating class. My father came with me, and anxious that I do well, he nervously paced the corridors while the exams were going on, just as he had done all the previous years during my year-end exams.

For five days, beginning Monday, the written tests were given from eight o'clock in the morning until one o'clock in the afternoon. Each day we had a different subject, and each student had a different text. I spent the afternoons and the evenings studying for the next day's exams. When the week was over, we were going to have two weeks vacation to prepare for the week-long oral tests. I did not have the chance to take them.

In our town, a young Jewish friend of my father's, Zoli Honig, had connections with the local police department. Through him, the Jewish community was informed about the impending plans concerning the Jews of the city. He alerted the Jewish community that soon all the families would be rounded up to be moved into the ghetto and deportations would start. This time my father did tell us the news, and it was the first time that I saw him scared. He was, by nature, an eternal optimist, always calm and hopeful. He would always find a reason for a glimmer of hope, believing that things would turn

for the better, even when no one else did. Seeing him so frightened and hopeless, a devastating fear came over me. I felt that the world had come crushing down on us. Suddenly, graduation, that had been so important to me a minute before, did not matter anymore!

It was decided right then that we would try to escape from the city, before we would be forcibly taken into the ghetto. There was talk that Evi, who had a non-Jewish appearance and could pass for an Aryan, should go into hiding in a convent. But Evi did not want to hear of being separated from us.

Our forged Gentile identity papers were ready; my father must have prepared them, but it was unbeknownst to me until then. We hastily made some more preparations. I went with my mother to the beauty shop (owned by Jewish girls) and had my red hair colored brown. The Hungarian Gentiles believed that anyone who had red hair must be a Jew. (This was also the reason that I experienced more chasing and stone-throwing on the streets.) Although I liked my curly hair better brown, I still did not look very Christian, as almost all the Hungarian Gentile girls had hair that was blond and straight.

According to our escape plan, each day one member of our family would travel to Budapest, where, for the moment, the Jews were still allowed to live in their own homes. We did not know for how long it would be - a few days, a few weeks - before the Jews of Budapest would also be moved into a ghetto, but we desperately wanted to gain some time. The Russian Army was already very close to Hungary's borders, practically on the other side of the Carpathian Mountains, so every day was crucial for our survival. We were hoping that soon Hitler would surrender.

A few Jewish Polish families lived in our city as Aryan Poles. They had come to Hungary with false Aryan documents - seizing the opportunity to seek refuge from Hitler - among the thousands of Aryan Poles who had fled their country when Germany invaded Poland in September, 1939. The Hungarian authorities aided the Gentile Polish refugees, but they were after the Jewish refugees. To find them, the police periodically conducted house to house searches (called "razia") in different parts of the city. Zoli Honig, the young man with the connection in the police department, alerted the community as to when and where these searches would take place. Then, the Jews of the city, risking their own safety, hid the Polish Jews in their homes. One particular family - a father, mother and teenage son (regrettably, I do not recall their name and probably had known them only by their false name) came to stay with us on such occasions. They were a handsome, assimilated Jewish family; tall, good looking, with an air of sophistication about them. They told us about the good life they had lived in Poland: tennis playing, horse-back riding on their estate, servants and big parties. Now they were hunted people who, after the dinner which my mother would prepare with special care, would hurry into the darkest corner of our house and wait until we knew that the searches were over and it was safe for them to return to their home.

Trying to persuade my parents to leave the country while it was still possible, our Polish friends would tell them, "It is just a matter of time until the Germans will invade Hungary, and then you will have the same fate as the Jews of Poland."

"Where would we go? How would I be able to provide for my family?" was my father's answer. Besides, the Hungarian Jews trusted the government with the liberal Admiral Horthy Miklos as the Regent (head of state). They ignored the fact that the viciously anti-Semitic Arrow Cross Party was

becoming more and more a significant political force. They did not heed the Polish Jews' predictions, and despite all the warning signs, the Jews of Hungary stayed.

When we decided to escape from our city, the father of our Polish friends, possibly to return our favor, offered to travel with each of us children to Budapest. We would pretend not to know each other, but he would keep an eye on us from a distance, and the next day, when he returned, he could tell our parents whether we had arrived in Budapest safely. Not that our parents could have done anything in case we did not.

I was the first to leave with my girlfriend Edith. With a rabbi's permission, we took the Friday evening train. We felt that this was the safest time to travel, because the darkness would make us less noticeable, and the Gentiles believed that Jews would not travel on a Friday after sundown.

It was early evening, still light outside, when my mother and father came with me to the door. I still see the agonized expression on their faces, the anguish in their eyes, as they sent their daughter in danger's way. They made their decision with heavy hearts, hoping that it would make surviving possible. There were no words spoken; only a quick hug was our goodbye before I stepped out the door. I could not have imagined then that the brief goodbye to my father was forever.

My brother, Ervin, came with me to the train station. I had taken off the yellow star, but he was wearing one. He needed it for the way back. He carried my suitcase in one hand, and with his free hand, he took off his cap and placed it over his yellow star to cover it. It would have been dangerous if someone were to see a Jew carrying a suitcase. Jews were no longer allowed to travel from one place to another. We took the side streets, the ones we thought most likely to be deserted. It was supper time, and hardly any people were on the streets. In accordance with the law, the windows were

covered with dark paper to keep the city dark. No light was allowed to be seen from the outside in case of air raids, so no one saw us from the houses as we passed by their windows.

On our way, we stopped for Edith. She already had said goodbye to her parents and the three of us continued our walk to the station. The sun had slowly disappeared, and as evening advanced it got darker which was a great help for us. We timed our arrival at the train station so that we could board immediately and not have to stand around. As we came close to the station, Ervin handed me the suitcase, we whispered good-bye and he quickly turned and started home. Without the suitcase, he did not have to cover his yellow star anymore. It was safer for him to have it showing in case he would meet someone who would recognize him and report him for not wearing a yellow star. I can just imagine in what torment my parents waited for him to return.

Our Polish friend was at the station already, and Edith and I boarded the train. In case someone would ask, our story was that we were friends going on a vacation to Budapest.

Our chaperone sat close to us, but we acted as if we did not know each other. In the train, only a very dim light was allowed and the darkness spared us from the suspicious and piercing glances of the other passengers. The Gentile population was eager to discover and report any Jew who tried to escape. We certainly did not look Christian - not me with my curly brown hair nor Edith with her auburn hair. We tried to be as inconspicuous as possible, and were very lucky that nobody asked us any questions. Burying our faces in each other's shoulder, Edith and I pretended to be asleep. After a few hours of traveling, the conductor came into the cabin and asked everyone to present their tickets and identification papers. This was expected and we just hoped it would pass without trouble. My heart was pounding like a beating drum; I was afraid that others would hear it. It was beating so fast as if it wanted to jump out of my body. But when the conductor got to us, Edith and I handed him

our false Gentile documents in a seemingly indifferent manner. (How we were able to pretend such calmness is mind-boggling to me today.) He flashed his flashlight first on our papers, then on our faces, and moved on to the next passenger. We relaxed a little, knowing that until daybreak we were relatively safe.

It was starting to become light outside, but we still had some time to travel until we would arrive in Budapest. Edith and I continued to pretend to be asleep and hid our faces as much as possible.

As we got close to the Budapest station, the train slowed down and all of a sudden there was a big commotion. A girl and a boy ran through the cabins and the conductor was running after them, hollering, "Catch them, catch them, they are Jews." The noise woke up the passengers, but they were still sleepy, and nobody moved. By this time, the train was moving slowly into the station, where there were a lot of people. Did that boy and girl have a chance to jump off the train and get lost in the crowd? I do not know! All I know is that they were Jews trying to escape and save their lives.

Edith and I got off the train and quickly mingled in the crowd. The Jews had to wear the yellow star in Budapest also, but they were not isolated in a ghetto yet. The situation was therefore somewhat less tense, at least for the time being. With our chaperone, we boarded a trolley to my maternal grandparents, the Grunbergs' apartment.

CHAPTER THREE

It was three years earlier that my grandparents had moved to Budapest. Before that, they had lived in a small village in the Carpathian region of Hungary, close to the Polish border.

This is the story of the maternal side of my family:

My grandfather, Shaje Grunberg, was a self-made millionaire. He was born and lived with his family in the northeastern part of Hungary, in a little village named Voloc, at the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. This was a region of mountains all covered with beautiful dense forests. Most of the inhabitants made their living from the timber industry. At a very young age, my grandfather worked for lumber companies, transporting the hewed trees on horse - drawn carts from the forests to the saw-mills. It did not take long until he had his own horse and cart, and purchased some small forests. He was now delivering his own timber to the saw-mills. His business grew and eventually he bought many more forest and established his own saw-mill and lumber- yard.

My grandfather married my grandmother, Pepi (Pesel)Neuman, and as the years went by they had ten children, five boys and five girls. Their third daughter, Anna, born in 1901, was my mother.

In later years, as a dowry for his daughters, - Rose, Serena, and Anna - my grandfather would set up his future son- in- laws in the lumber business. The two younger daughters, Elza married an



My grandfather, Shajc Grünberg, vacationing
in the Tatra Mountains.

architect, and Luiza married a dentist. My grandfather's sons, Emil, Dezso, Lajos and Moritz were also in the lumber business. Erno, the youngest became an attorney.

World War I broke out in 1914 and when the Russians advanced toward Hungary's border, the family, fearing Communism, left their home and fled in the direction of Budapest. During the long journey on a horse-drawn carriage, a blood-clot developed in my grandmother's leg, which was already troubled by varicose veins. My forty-two year old grandmother died in Budapest, leaving my grandfather with ten children, the youngest still a baby.

During my childhood, I would sometimes find my mother in front of my grandmother's picture, which hung above the bed in my parents' bedroom. She talked to her, poured her heart out, and over the years, after Auschwitz, I would feel the need to do the same in front of my mother's picture.

World War I ended and under the Treaty of Versailles, Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory to neighboring countries. The family returned to Voloc, which now belonged to the newly formed Czechoslovakia.

My grandfather remained a widower for several years, and during that time my mother, a young girl, and her older sister Serena, took care of their siblings. Her oldest sister Rose was already married to Herman Gottesman and had her own children to take care of.

In December, 1923 my mother married my father, Izidor Kupferstein, and they settled in the city of Debrecen, which was in the part of the country that after World War I the Hungarians referred to as the "Crippled Mother Country" or "The Mutilated Hungary". My brother Ervin and I were born in Debrecen, and I was about two years old when we moved to the nearby Nyiregyhaza. Our family

grew with the birth of my sister Eva and my brother Otto, whom we affectionately called Ocsi (little brother).

By this time my grandfather had remarried, and with his second wife had two children: A boy, Miklos (we called him Matyu), who was three months older than I was, and a girl, Vera, who was younger than me by one year. I considered Matyu and Vera more as cousins than as uncle and aunt.

I must have been six or seven years old when I first learned that my grandmother Linka was my mother's stepmother, and that I was named in Hebrew after my mother's mother, Pesel. Each of my mother's siblings and many others in the extended family named their first born daughters after my grandmother. After my liberation from the Lager I discovered with amazement that all the Pesels in our family survived Aushwitz, except a baby cousin of mine. Babies had no chance of survival.

My grandfather's business flourished and he became a wealthy man. At my earliest recollection, my grandfather employed a couple hundred workers in his lumber-yard. On my visits to my grandparents, as a child, I would watch with fascination as the men operating the machines transformed the timbers into boards and planks. The name Shaje Grunberg was well known not only in the region but far beyond, and more importantly, it was always associated with his many charitable deeds. Decades later, when I was already in America, I would meet people who had known my grandfather. They would eagerly tell me about his enormous generosity, how he sought out those in need, never refusing anyone who turned to him for help. Some told me that the yeshivas (Hebrew Schools) they had attended were maintained solely by Shaje Grunberg. The enthusiasm with which they told me their stories led me to believe that they felt privileged to have known him.



From left to right:
My brother Ervin sitting next to his young uncle Matzu.



My young aunt Vera, at the age of thirteen.

Our whole family spent a lot of time in Voloc. The Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Succos holidays as well as Passover were celebrated annually at my grandparents' spacious three story home. It resembled a castle with its rounded architecture, curved balconies, and small towers on the four corners of the roof which was covered with orange colored shingles. Not only did my thirty plus family members attend the Passover Seder, but some men and women, who had no family in the village, were also invited to celebrate with us.

My grandfather conducted the Seder services. At the head of the table, he sat on a sofa and, in accordance with Jewish tradition, leaned against some propped up pillows. The young grandchildren settled on the sofa around him, waiting with excited anticipation for the right moment to "steal" and hide the afikomen* and ransom it for a gift at the end of the Seder. This was meant to keep the children awake and to participate in the Haggadah reading, the story of how G-d took the Jewish people out of Egyptian slavery.

Even though Voloc was a small village it was not a backward place. Nestled in a valley, surrounded by the majestic Carpathian Mountains, vacationers came from distant big cities such as Prague and Budapest. In the summer, they would come to enjoy its crystal clear air and beautiful scenery, and the mountains were perfect for skiers in the winter. Visitors flocked into Voloc in the mid 1930's when the Czechs built a ski slope and held a small scale winter Olympics there.

My brothers, sister and I, along with our cousins, spent every summer vacation in Voloc. Those

*Afikomen; The piece of matzah put away at the beginning of the Seder service to be eaten at the conclusion of the meal.



My grandparents' house in Voloc.

were carefree, wonderful times. An innocent, fairy-tale world, with no worries of children being abducted, we would leave the house soon after breakfast, only to return when it was time for dinner at noon, and supper in the evening. We played in the lumber-yard building little houses, and jumped and buried ourselves in heaps of sawdust. Free as birds, we roamed the nearby hills, picking berries and collecting hazelnuts from the plentiful bushes, competing to see who could gather the most hazelnuts to take home. The next day, the wonderful aroma of hazelnut cakes and pastries would permeate the air throughout the house.

With aunts, uncles, cousins, and vacationers who quickly became friends of the family, we went on day-long outings on the mountains, aiming for the summit. We left at early dawn, each of us carrying a backpack full of sandwiches and snacks, and as we reached the top of the high mountains, we found them covered with snow, even in summertime. After a short rest in the small lodging house (called "Chata" in Czech) we started back down the mountains' serpentine roads, winding our way through the forests which echoed our singing and laughter. My family and the rest of the population lived a happy life under the democratic, enlightened Czech government.

An oversized framed picture of Tomas Masaryk, the beloved president of Czechoslovakia, was prominently displayed in my grandparents' living room.

In 1938, backed by Hitler, Hungary retook some of its lost territories, including Voloc, from Czechoslovakia. It was a sad day for the Jews when the Hungarian troops marched into the region. The Jews feared the Hungarians, knowing their traditional hatred towards them and that they taught their very young from the cradle on that the Jews crucified Jesus and were evil people.

We spent our last summer vacation in Voloc in 1939. My sister and I were thrilled that there was no more need for passports and that there were no more border checks. But our vacation was not as pleasant as before. We had many heated discussions with our young aunt, Vera. She was sad; she missed her wonderful Czech friends who had moved, while my sister and I expressed our happiness over the reunification of our country. Evi and I, along with all the children in Hungary, were taught in school (non-Jewish and Jewish alike) to be true patriots.

Our schooldays started with reciting the poem:

" Can it stay like this?	(Maradhat ez így ?)
No, no never!	(Nem, nem, soha)
The mutilated Hungary is not a country	(Csonka Magyar ország nem ország)
The greater Hungary is Heaven!"	Egész Magyar ország Menyország)

There were many similar patriotic songs and slogans taught in school expressing the Hungarian people's desperation over the maiming of their homeland. I considered Hungary my country and had been so indoctrinated that I truly felt that a terrible injustice had happened to Hungary at the end of World War I with the Treaty of Versailles.

My grandparents' fear of the Hungarians proved to be with good reason, when in 1940 my grandfather was arrested, accused of being a Communist. His release was eventually obtained with money and connections, but the family had to leave Voloc, leaving behind the business, their spacious

home, beautiful furniture, Persian rugs, silver, and all their fine Czeck china and crystal. In 1941 my grandparents moved to Budapest where they rented a small apartment in a modest building on Arena Street, in a middle-class neighborhood. They shared the apartment with Matyu, Vera, my uncle, Lajos, and his wife Feigi, who was expecting a baby. After the German occupation of Hungary, when Jews fled from the countryside to Budapest, many found refuge in my grandparents' small apartment until they could find a hiding place for themselves.



My uncle Lajos Grünberg

CHAPTER FOUR

When Edith and I fled to Budapest, we stayed with my grandparents. Being with them I was relaxed, and I was confident that my family would be able to follow me. Was it because of my youth that I was sure this was just a temporary situation? I thought we would only have to be in hiding for a short time, and then we could go home and continue our lives the way we had lived before.

Our Polish friend, who had been our escort to Budapest, returned to Nyiregyhaza and came back two days later with my fifteen year old sister, Evi. He made one more trip after that, returning with my fourteen year old brother, Otto. Then came my brother, Ervin, who was not yet twenty. With the children safely in Budapest, my mother left our home, and with her arrival, I assured myself that my father would be with us soon and our family would survive this war. It did not happen that way. By the time my father was to come, he and all the Jews in our city were moved into the ghetto. My father did attempt to escape, as we later learned, but he was caught and imprisoned. Shortly after that, the ghetto was liquidated, and my father was taken together with the rest of the Jews to Auschwitz.

Fast-forward to 1995: During a visit with my husband's sisters in Australia, I met a woman from Nyiregyhaza who related to me that she and her family were in the same cattle wagon as my father.

"He davened (prayed) constantly, all the way to Auschwitz" she told me. My dear father! He was probably thanking G-d for his family being safe in Budapest.

As soon as my mother arrived in Budapest, we started making plans for our hiding. It was decided that we would each go into hiding separately, so that if one of us would be caught, the others would still have a chance to survive. But Evi would be with my mother; she was not willing to be separated from her.

My father's older brother, Uncle Israel lived in Budapest and through his business knew many Gentile people. He knew of one family whose house was in the outskirts of Budapest, and since this was an industrial part of the city, one of the main targets of bombardment by the Allied forces, the family left to live in the countryside. My uncle rented the house and I, with my girlfriend Edith, went to stay there. And so began the different phases of my life in hiding.

We stayed in this house for only a few days. We felt terribly alone and scared, so when Edith learned that her parents and sister had arrived safely in Budapest, she wanted to be with them. I went back to my grandparents.

My next hiding place was also found by my uncle. This time it was with a young working Gentile couple, who, for money, were willing to take me in. Their apartment consisted of one room, which was divided by curtains into small cubicles. I stayed in one of the cubicles where there was space for only a bed. The couple left for work in the morning and I was alone all day. I was not to move around, for any noise the neighbors would hear would arouse their suspicion. There was no bathroom in the apartment, only at the end of the corridor, was a communal toilet. During the day it was very risky to go out of the apartment because someone might see me. At night in the dark it was safer, but what if someone else would have to use the toilet at the same time? I stayed behind the curtains in my

cubicle, sat on the bed, and cried day and night. I didn't sleep, I didn't eat. When the couple came home in the evening they asked me to have supper with them but with emotions choking my throat, I felt I would not be able to swallow even one bite. After barely a week, I could not tolerate the loneliness anymore. I had no contact with anyone from my family; I did not know what was happening to them. I felt like I was being walled in alive.

Again, I went back to my grandparents. My mother and Evi were still with them. My brother Otto was placed with a Christian family in a similar situation to mine. Ervin rented a room and signed up for a job in an government-owned factory. Ervin had the advantage that his appearance was a lot like a Gentile's. He had straight blond hair, fair skin, and a straight nose; his features were not Jewish, and he had perfect Aryan documents. His identification papers were not fictitious; they were bought from an existing Gentile boy. Ervin became Waczy Istvan (Stephen Waczy) a very Christian sounding name. In the factory, security was tight; he had to present the identification papers every morning upon arrival. I guess they thought that no Jew would dare to do this and they were not suspicious.

Still, one day a young co-worker came up to him and said: "Today your name is Waczy, but yesterday it was Weisz". Ervin jumped up. "How dare you insult a Gentile like this!" he hollered and slapped the young man across his face. When Ervin was telling me this episode, not long ago, we both marveled at how he had the courage, and how, in the spur of the moment, he had the presence of mind to refute the young man like this, to silence him. One had to have amazing ability to handle situations in order to survive.

I wanted to be with my mother and sister; I felt I could not endure being separated from them. We decided to rent a room together as a Gentile family. On our fictitious papers, the three of us had

the same false last name (which I can not recall anymore). We kept our first names; Anna, Agnes and Eva, since they did not sound Jewish. According to the papers, we came from the small village of Voloc. Our story was that since our village was close to the Polish border, we left our home out of fear of the approaching Russian army.

Through a newspaper ad, we rented a furnished room in a middle class neighborhood from a widow, whose son was away, probably in the army. While we stayed there - it turned out to be a very short time - we went to see my grandparents every day. They were preparing to flee to neighboring Slovakia where we still had relatives. Most of the Slovak Jews had already been deported in 1942, but there were still those who had special permits to stay, because they were needed by the state for their jobs in important industries. And at the moment they were not being bothered.

My grandparents' apartment was quite a distance from our rented room. We had to travel by trolley and those trips were terrifying. The majority of Hungary's population being Catholic, each time we passed a church the passengers would cross themselves, and trying to act as Christians, we would cross ourselves as well. But after a while we stopped doing it, fearing if we didn't do it correctly it would give us away. We feared not only the Germans, but also the ordinary Hungarian citizens, who scrutinized people's faces with piercing stares, to discover anyone with Semitic looks not wearing the yellow star. We were terrified that one of them would have the idea that we looked Jewish and start asking questions. The Gentile documents were fine as long as no one got suspicious and no questions were asked. Once disguised Jews were stopped, they would become so frightened that they would give themselves away, and usually end up arrested. Only on rare occasions, as was the case with my brother, was a Jew bold and brave enough to be able to withstand the confrontation. But my mother

missed the family so much that we took the risk to go and spend some time with them, no matter how dangerous it was.

We had been staying in the rented room for about a week when the landlady's son came home for the weekend. That Saturday night a loud argument coming from the next room woke us up. It was the son screaming and accusing his mother of hiding us, Jews, and threatening that he would report her. There is no way to put our utter terror in words as his screaming went on and on for a long time. Shaking with fright the three of us crowded onto my mother's bed. We sat in her bed hugging each other in anguished silence. A while later the hollering stopped. He must have decided that he would take care of the matter the next morning. We spent that long, awful night trembling, waiting for what would happen to us next. Very early in the morning, being careful not to make the slightest noise, we got dressed. Each of us put on a few layers of underwear and the few dresses that we had and walked out of the apartment not even closing the door behind us so as to avoid making any sound. We were hoping that the landlady's son was still asleep and would not follow us. Hurriedly, we tiptoed down the stairway, but once on the street we had to slow down so as not to draw attention to ourselves. We did not dare to look back to see whether he was following us.

Leaving our rented room we had nowhere to go. Just a day before, my grandparents, my young aunt Vera, my uncle Lajos, and his wife Feigi with their two year old daughter had left for Slovakia. Miklos (Matyu), my mother's eighteen year old brother, went into hiding as a Christian.

It is hard to describe how fearful we were being out on the street, where at any moment someone could point a finger at us, say that we look Jewish, and drag us to the police. It is hard to describe how it was to live in hiding, to be forced to be a fugitive, our only "crime" being that we were born Jewish. The panic that we felt is incomprehensible to those who did not live through it.

From a public telephone we called Ervin and met him in a park. In this sad and desperate situation we had to be careful to give the appearance of being a carefree Christian family, spending a nice Sunday morning in the park.

Ervin brought a newspaper with him to look for another room to rent. This time, we thought, it would be safer to rent in a more affluent neighborhood, hoping that the upper class, more educated Christians would be more tolerant. I never wondered how we had money to live on. Being with my mother I did not worry about that. She probably brought money with her from home. It was so difficult for my mother, since in our house, all finances were taken care of by my father. My mother had been very sheltered and dependent on my father and now she was left alone with the terrible responsibility to make all the decisions herself, to save her family.

We knew Budapest well, from our vacations and the time when I went to school there. (I attended the fourth and fifth grades of the Gymnasium in Budapest in a private school, where I was allowed to miss classes on Saturdays as long as I kept up with the homework.) So, when we saw in the newspaper that there were some furnished rooms for rent in Buda, the hilly part of Budapest on the other side of the Danube river, we recognized from the address that this was the upper class section of the city.

Ervin came with us to rent the apartment. Today I see how foolish it was for us to let him come along. To take the risk that he would also be arrested if it were discovered that we were Jews. But he was trying to give moral support to my mother.

A pharmacist's widow was renting out her apartment. She wanted to leave Budapest to avoid the air- raids, which were getting more and more frequent, the sirens sounding several times a day.

After we introduced ourselves by our false names, according to our papers, we told her our "story": We fled from our home which was close to the Polish border fearing the approaching Russian army. Ervin's last name was different from ours, therefore we introduced him as my boyfriend. This was a very unlikely story, since there was such a strong resemblance between the two of us. Also, why would a Gentile family want to come to live in Budapest, the city that was the target of Allied bombings, instead of choosing the safety of a smaller town where things were quiet for the Christian population? All this made people easily suspicious and we knew it, but there was nothing we could change. We just had to hope and pray every minute of the day.

The woman did not ask questions. My feeling is that she suspected that we were Jews. Maybe she felt sorry for us and thought that by pretending not to know it, she would not be in danger. Or maybe she needed the money. The rent was high and it was not easy to rent an apartment in Budapest in those days, except to hiding Jews. Even in peaceful times, in the summer, whoever could left for the countryside to escape the heat of the sweltering apartments in the steaming city.

She rented the apartment to us and we stayed right away.

When I look back on those days, I see how poorly we played the role of our Gentile identities in an environment where the population so passionately hunted the Jews.

Now we lived in a modern building on a tree-lined street, in one of the nicest sections of Buda, populated by Christians. Even the weather was beautiful - sunshine and blue skies every day. The beautiful weather did not reflect the fear and sorrow in our hearts. Constantly alert as to whether anyone was looking at us with suspicion, we never relaxed, not even for a moment. We didn't talk about what might have happened to my father or where he might be. Was it because those thoughts

would have been too painful, or were our minds so full of fear for our own lives that there was no room for any other thoughts?

The landlady stayed on for a couple of days and she came back for weekends. She kept her bedroom for herself and we used the rest of the apartment. She was an intelligent, pleasant and friendly woman. Whenever my mother was in the kitchen she would go to talk to her and in the meantime she watched with suspicious eyes how my mother did the cooking. The Gentiles knew about the Jewish law of not mixing meat with dairy products, so my mother was careful to prepare the meals the way a Gentile woman would. It was heartbreaking for my mother that we could not keep kosher (Jewish dietary laws), but we could not trust this woman not to report us if she knew for sure that we were Jews. Today I want to believe that she did know, but wanted to help us.

On the 6th of June we woke up to a beautiful day. The news on the radio made it seem that this time the sun was shining also for us. It reported the Normandy Invasion, the Allied Forces landing on the shores of Normandy in France. The happiness we felt is indescribable! Listening to the news, I pictured the Allies an army of angels pushing toward the beaches of Normandy. I felt that the heavens had opened and the parachuting soldiers were descending to this earth for one reason only: to rescue us. It was the first time since we left home that we saw some hope for the future. I envisioned that the war would end in a matter of days. Surely Hitler would surrender now. He must acknowledge and accept that he lost the war. I spread a map of Europe on the table and followed the Allied troops' advances in Italy and France. To our surprise the newspapers and the radio did report the success of the Normandy landing, but we also read with sorrow about the enormous losses the Allies had

suffered, which the media was so eager to report in great detail. I felt that every soldier who died gave his life trying to rescue us.

Only after the war had ended did I learn that the world did not care about us. The Allies and the Russians knew what was happening to the Jews of Europe, but it was not in their war plans to do something about it.

A few days went by before I realized that the war would not end so soon. Hitler was obsessed with fighting for every square inch of land; he would not surrender. The Allied Forces fought fiercely for each little village, for each tiny town, but they encountered such resistance from the Germans that they could only advance ever so slowly, and for us it was painfully slow. Every day it was a miracle to survive in that hostile world.

The safest place to be was in the apartment and we would have preferred to stay in all the time, to not go on the streets at all, but we had to be careful to give the appearance of living a normal life. We went grocery shopping; I had to go to the beautician periodically to color my hair. And there were the air-raids, when by law everyone had to leave the apartments to go into the air-raid shelters. I was not afraid of the bombs. I felt that those planes, those pilots up in the air were our friends, our liberators, our only hope. The more often the air-raids came, the more hopeful I was that the Nazis would surrender before we would be caught, before we would be tortured. I was more afraid of being caught than the bombs. Every time the sirens began to wail, I felt that our liberation was coming a step closer.

In the air-raid shelter, located in the basement of our building, the tenants looked at us with suspicion. They all wanted to know who we were and where we had come from. On one occasion a

distinguished looking gentleman came up to us to ask where we had lived before. When we mentioned Voloc, (my grandparents' former home town) as was written in our false papers, he said: "I know the village; I spent a vacation there. Do you know the priest of the little church?" My mother knew exactly where the church was and described it to him. She knew the priest and told the man his name. At that moment, the ear-shattering noise of a nearby exploding bomb diverted his attention, and made him so scared that he left us alone. But this was a close call for us.

During the air- raids, the three of us sat close to each other; my mother sat in the middle, and my sister and I buried our heads in her lap. She bent over us so that if a bomb would hit the building we would die together. We did not want to live without each other.

Somehow our lives slowly fell into a routine. Evi and I cleaned the apartment; my mother cooked. Ervin came for supper very often. This was important for my mother. She wanted to see him and was also worried that he was not eating properly, since he lived alone. Ocsi was still with the Gentile family, where he was placed when our hiding began. We paid them for keeping him. We felt he was too young to live alone on false Christian papers, and that it would be safer for him to live with people who knew he was Jewish. Ocsi was not allowed to leave the apartment, so my mother would go to visit him, not caring about the incredible danger that went with these visits. She couldn't bear not to see him. Evi and I would go along, and wait on the street (a daring thing to do) while Mother spent some time with our brother. These visits were so painful for her, not knowing whether there would be a next time when she would see her son again. Only now that I am a mother myself can I fully understand my mother's suffering.

Although our lives were enveloped with danger and fear, we children started to adjust to this way

of life. But my mother couldn't. She was grieving silently about my father and she missed the rest of her family, - her parents, sisters, and brothers - with whom she always felt so close. She felt isolated, because living as Christians we could not be in contact with anyone from the Jewish community. She was longing to see the few family members who lived as Gentiles in the city, but it was inadvisable for Jews in hiding to get together, because if one of them would be caught, they would be tortured until they would reveal the whereabouts of other disguised Jews. Despite this, we did go to visit my cousin Ilonka who also had fled to Budapest and was living as a Christian on false papers.

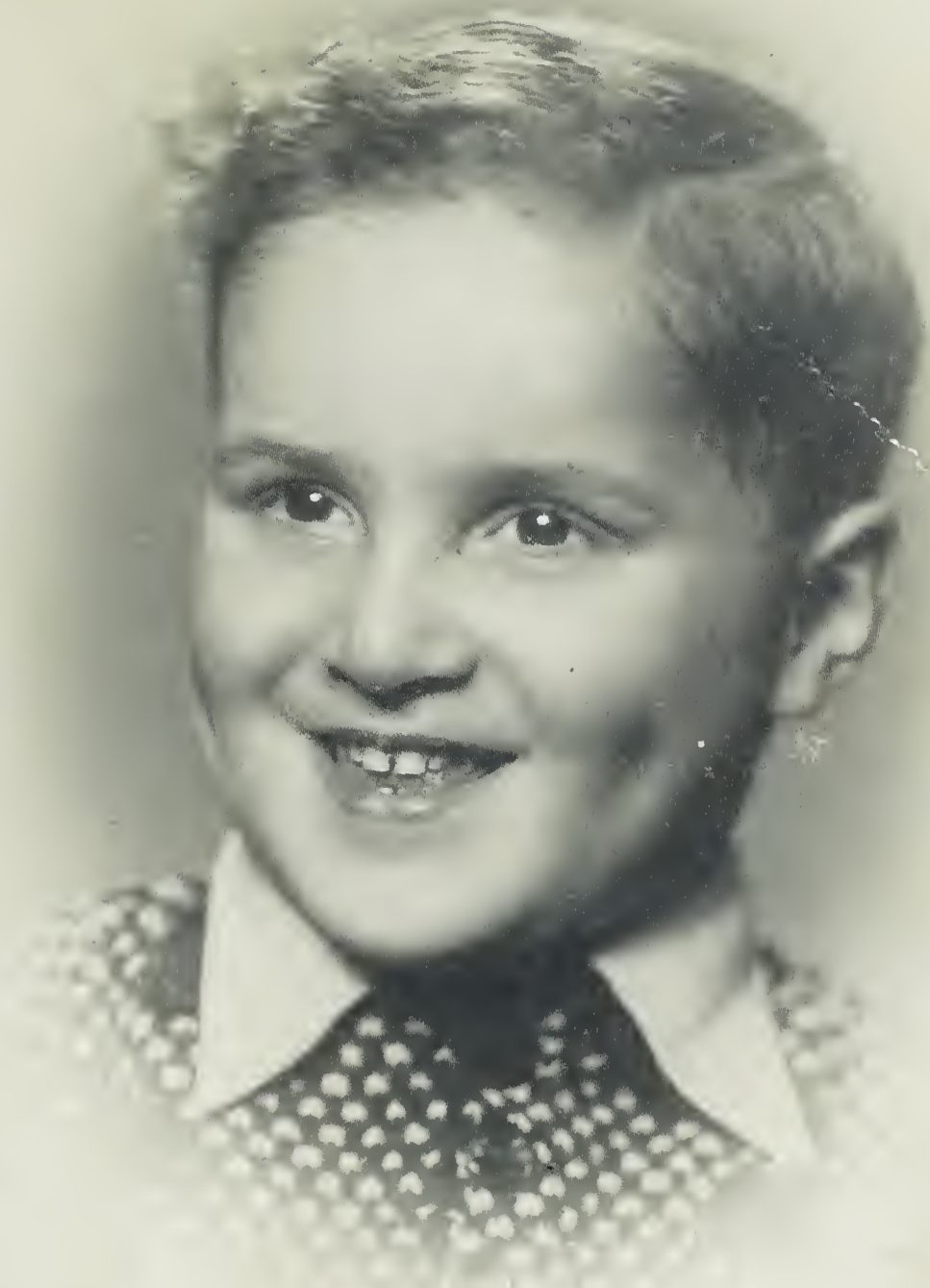
Ilonka was the daughter of my mother's oldest sister, Rose. We lived in the same city while I was growing up. Being seven years younger than her, I was thrilled when she would ask me to spend a day or an overnight visit with her. At the young age of seventeen, Ilonka got married to her uncle (our mothers' younger brother, Moritz), and moved away to an other city, Ungvar. But she came often for long visits with her husband and their baby, Tommy, with whom I used to love to play. When the Germans took over Hungary, Ilonka and her family came back to Nyiregyhaza to be with her parents. Shortly after they arrived, Moritz suddenly became very ill with an infection. With no penicillin available to treat him, he passed away within a week. People who attended the funeral were all wearing the yellow star already. This was a tragedy in our family. And who could have imagined then the tragedies that would follow?

Ilonka fled to Budapest just before the Jews of Nyiregyhaza were moved into the ghetto, hoping that her parents would follow her with five year old Tommy. But her little son was taken with his grandparents into the ghetto and later shipped to Auschwitz where they all perished.

In Budapest, Ilonka rented a small studio suite and we were anxious to go to see her. On our way, my mother, Evi and I would constantly look over our shoulders to check whether someone was



Monty, My mother's younger brother, who married his niece, Honka.



Moritz and Olonka's little son Tommy. 1943

1943-1944
J. H. H. H.
J. H. H. H.

following us. And at the same time we were scouring the streets ahead of us for any sight of the Gendarmes, the Hungarian Storm troopers. These were young man recruited from the most vicious, merciless Jew haters. Their special duty was to hunt down the disguised Jews. They were mounted on horseback, wearing their green uniforms and notorious hats with the long dark shiny cock-tail, the mere sight of which aroused dread. We were always on the lookout for them and spotted them from far away. When we saw Gendarmes in the distance, we would never go toward that direction.

We got to the apartment building and quietly hurried up the stairs. As we closed the door behind us, and Ilonka greeted us with hugs and kisses, we forgot our miserable situation. There was an atmosphere of old times as she right away busied herself, setting the small table in the tiny kitchenette, offering us tea and sandwiches. Those were precious moments that we spent together but it was also very sad because we were there to say good-bye to Ilonka. She soon fled from Budapest, trying to save her life in Bucharest, Romania. We had no way of knowing whether she had succeeded in getting there.

Fanny Brecher, my mother's cousin, who was also a hiding Jew, was courageous enough to meet us in a park. We would sit on benches close by, pretending not to know each other. We stayed for a short while and as we were leaving, careful that no one was nearby who could hear us, we whispered the time and place for our next meeting. These meetings were infrequent, and although we could not talk to one another, it meant so much to my mother just to see someone from her family for a few fleeting moments. It gave her some strength to go on.

One of my mother's brothers, Uncle Dezso, was stationed in the outskirts of Budapest in a Hungarian military slave labor battalion set up for Jewish men. My mother wanted to see him, so the three of us



Fridi Brecher, my mother's cousin.



My uncle
Gonso

traveled by streetcar and took some food packages for him. I have no idea what my mother told the guards once we got there, why we, Gentile women, came to see a Jewish man. It is unbelievable that Jews in hiding would dare to do such a thing but Mother missed the family so much that it made her disregard the risks of these meetings and visits.

The news reports about the war continued to give us hope. The Russian army on the east and the Allied forces on the west were advancing, but to me it seemed they were only able to crawl from one village to the next. I wished so hard they would move forward faster, and I believed that the sheer intensity of my concentrated thoughts would propel the Allied army all the way to Paris. I thought: This will make Hitler finally surrender.

Meanwhile, the situation for the Jews in Budapest steadily grew worse. By the middle of July, all the Jews were removed from their homes and crammed into so called "Jewish houses." These houses with the yellow star affixed on the front door (indicating that Jews lived there) were scattered all over the city. The Hungarian government hoped that by doing this the bombing would stop or at least would be reduced, because surely the enemy, the friend of the Jews, wouldn't want to kill them. Being concentrated in those marked houses, the Jews were easy targets for the Germans and the Hungarian Nazis, the "Nyilas" "Arrow-Cross" Party.

Since hiding in Budapest was becoming increasingly dangerous with each passing day, the disguised Jews, among them a few of the remaining members of our family, tried to escape to neighboring Slovakia or Romania, where at the moment the situation of the Jews was still somewhat safer.

My grandparents, who had fled to Slovakia a few weeks earlier, hired a Slovak peasant to smuggle some of our family members from Budapest to Slovakia. Ocsi, my younger brother; Matyu, my mother's youngest brother; and Gizi, my Uncle Dezso's wife, with a baby daughter, Chaya traveled by train to meet their guide at the Slovak border. Aliza, the five year old daughter of uncle Dezso and aunt Gizi was left in Budapest with a Gentile woman, a total stranger to that frightened child who was devastated that her parents had abandoned her. Aliza survived, and was reunited with her father after the war, but never got over how cruelly that woman treated her.

The family arrived at the meeting place in the middle of the night, but the guide did not show up. The Hungarian police arrested them and took them to a concentration camp in Mosonmagyaróvár, from where Matyu managed to escape with the help of Terry, a Christian girl. Terry, an eighteen year old daughter of the superintendent of the apartment building where my grandparents used to live, had a crush on my young uncle. Matyu returned to Budapest and living there as a Christian survived the war. But I never learned the details as to how Terry was able to accomplish his rescue.

Some weeks later Ocsi, my aunt Gizi, and her baby were shipped from the concentration camp to Auschwitz, where my aunt and her baby were killed in the gas chamber as soon as they arrived. My brother, only fourteen years old but tall for his age, when asked "How old?" said that he was sixteen, and he was taken for work. This is based on information I received many years later from the International Tracing Service. It is so often that I think of my young brother: How many blows did he have to endure, how many times was his meager ration of bread stolen from him? How much cruelty did he have to suffer from fellow inmates? How many times did he cry out for our parents: I'm hungry, I'm cold, I am hurting! Separated from my aunt, he knew no one. Was he able to find a friend? Those thoughts agonize me!



Aliza at about when she was three years old.



SERVICE INTERNATIONAL DE RECHERCHES
INTERNATIONAL TRACING SERVICE
INTERNATIONALER SUCHDIENST

Bad Arolsen, 16th June 1997
Mer/AFi

Mr Steven F. Mandell
American Liaison Officer
Holocaust and War Victims
Tracing and Information Center
Central Maryland Chapter
American Red Cross
4700 Mount Hope Drive

Baltimore, MD 21215-3231

USA

Your Reference
ISS-31507
Inquirer: Agnes Greenfeld

Our Reference
(please quote)
T/D - 1 512 423

Re.: Mr Otto KUPFERSTEIN, born in Nyiregyhaza in August 1930

Dear Mr Mandell,

We refer to your inquiries received here on 28th July 1992 and 27th June 1995 as well as to our report of 23rd August 1995. Please be advised that a check of the documentary material available here has been made according to mandate.

The following particulars could be taken from the post-war records of the International Tracing Service:

KUPFERSTEIN, Otto, born on 9.7.1928,
Nationality: Hungarian,

was incarcerated in Concentration Camp Auschwitz/
Commando Trzebinia at a time not indicated,
Prisoner's No. B-10125.
Category: "J" (= Jude)

Owing to the incomplete personal data, we are unfortunately not in a position to ascertain whether the indications mentioned above apply to the person inquired about.

According to what we were able to ascertain, the Prisoner's No. B-10125 was issued in Concentration Camp Auschwitz on 15th September 1944 (transport from Hungary, by order of the "Reichssicherheitshauptamt").

We remain

with kind regards,

W. Jeck

W. Jeck
for the Archives

Grosse Allee 5 - 9, 34444 BAD AROLSEN, Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Tel. (056 91) 60 37, Telegr. ITS Bad Arolsen

*The letter from the International Tracing Service
regarding the information I requested about my
brother's fate.*

When we heard that Ocsi had been captured, Mother became more and more distraught and felt that she could not go on living in hiding. She wanted to be among Jews, she wanted us to move into one of the "Jewish Houses" and face our fate with our fellow Jews. But this was not as easy as we thought.

We tried to move into one of the "Jewish Houses" but, to our terrible disappointment, we were informed that because the place was already overcrowded, they could not take us in. Others turned us away because we could not be registered, since we were not able to tell where we were coming from, where we were before. We tried other "Jewish Houses" but soon we realized that none would take us.

Our other hope was the Swedish Embassy. Raoul Wallenberg, Sweden's ambassador to Hungary, established a few "Swedish Houses" and was giving refuge to Jews in an effort to save some. One early morning my mother left for the Embassy. She did not let us to come along because not wearing the Jewish star while waiting around the Embassy until we would be let in was extremely dangerous. This risk she wanted to take alone. Evi and I waited in the apartment as hour after hour went by and Mother still did not come back. We were terrified that something dreadful had happened to her, that she had been arrested. I leaned out of the window, practically hanging out of it, and hoped that since our apartment was on a hilly street I could spot her when she was still far away. It would mean so much to us to see her even a few seconds sooner and know that she is safely walking home.

That day stays in my memory as agonizingly dark, even though it was a beautiful sunny summer day. Evi and I did not move from the window and then in the late afternoon, I saw something moving on the top of the hill. It only looked like a little dot, but I knew it was our mother. I will never forget the paralyzing fear I felt throughout the day and the indescribable happiness when she was close

enough for us to be sure that it was our mother. I was so happy to see her that I hardly paid attention as she told us with despair that she could not accomplish what she went for. There were so many desperate Jews waiting around the Embassy, pushing and shoving each other, all trying to get in. The aggressive ones succeeded but by the time our mother was able to reach the gate it was late afternoon and they were closing the Embassy. She was turned away; they did not listen to her plight.

We felt so alone, so helpless, there was nowhere to turn to anymore. Nobody wanted us. We had to go on living on Christian papers fearing for our lives every moment of the day.

The war was going badly for the Germans but Hitler still did not want to acknowledge it, and did not want to listen to his military advisors who saw that he was leading Germany to its ruins. There were many plans made by Hitler's military leaders to kill him, of which at that time we did not know about, but none were successful.

On the twentieth of July, the radio reported that an assassination attempt had been made against Hitler. At first there were conflicting reports. Nobody knew whether Hitler was alive or not. Once again we felt incredibly hopeful. But our happiness lasted only a few hours when soon the rest of the news arrived; Hitler was unharmed.

We learned that in the briefcase of one of his army officers, a bomb was brought into the room where a meeting was scheduled to take place. The bomb went off, killing people all around. Hitler was shaken but he was injured only slightly. Historians have recorded that if Hitler was a madman until then, after this incident he became insane with rage. He made the officers who were involved and some who he suspected of being involved suffer the most gruesome death a human being could invent.

Our happiness was shattered, but knowing that members of his closest military circle wanted him to be killed left us with some hope that soon there might be another attempt on his life and this time it would be successful.

Once in a while and just for some brief moments, I was able to be optimistic that the end of this horrible nightmare might not be too far away and maybe it was possible to survive. The Nazis were losing the war and they knew it. Still, this did not change the Hungarians' virulent hatred toward the Jews. Quite the contrary. As the news from the battlefields worsened for the Nazis, they with their Hungarian partners, became more feverish in their efforts to hunt down and exterminate the remaining Jews. Their urgent priority was to finish off the "Final Solution" before the war would come to an end.

In the beginning of August we got word from my grandparents in Slovakia that they wanted us to come there. Soon they would send a Slovak guide to take us over the border to join them. While we were waiting for the arrangements for our escape, we had to continue to give the impression that we were living as a normal Christian family. As much as we trembled with fear each time we stepped out on the street, we had to go out often. We lived in a high-rise apartment building on a high floor and had to take the elevator that was manned by the superintendent or by a member of his family. Although we were afraid of the superintendent and the tenants who scrutinized us in the elevator, it would have aroused a lot of suspicion if they would have never seen us going anywhere.

Being on the street was suicidal with the Gendarmes patrolling constantly. Therefore, to avoid roaming on the streets, we would go to the movies. Sitting in the dark movie theater gave us some sense of safety. One Sunday afternoon, Ervin, Evi and I went to see the "Wizard of Oz", which I

believe had its premier in Budapest that summer. There was a large crowd, mostly teenage boys and girls at the front of the movie theater. While we waited to be let in, the three of us formed a tight circle trying to hide our faces. We listened with grieving hearts as the boys and girls were chatting, laughing and giggling. The crowd around us was so free and happy as young people usually are, but we felt so frightened, so depressed, so hunted. I was envious that these boys and girls had come to enjoy the movie as we used to not long ago. But now we had come to feel some safety in the dark if only for a couple of hours.

It was towards the end of August when the landlady came home for the weekend and her son came to visit her. We had already seen pictures of him in the apartment. His hobby must have been photography since in his room, which was also rented to us, some of the drawers were filled with hundreds of photographs and slides of himself and a girl. They were a good-looking pair; he seemed to be a clean-cut, nice young man in his twenties. To pass the time, Evi and I entertained ourselves looking through these pictures, and we tried to figure out whether they were already engaged. We forgot our problems for the moment and we joked and giggled, as we had done in better times.

The landlady introduced her son to us, but he was not friendly and we sensed trouble. Very soon after, as they went into their room, we heard him hollering at his mother and the scene from our previous hiding place was repeated. Screaming vicious anti-Semitic remarks, he accused his mother of hiding Jews and demanded that she get rid of us.

Hearing his screams, we were bewildered and numbed, but we stayed on because we had no other choice. We could not go looking for another apartment, because by now the Gentile population was obsessed with catching every Jew living in hiding. Jews were the prime topic of their conversation.

They said the Jews brought on the war and the destruction, and blamed the Jews for any misfortune that happened.

There was no place for us to go; we did not know what else to do, except wait for what would happen next.

After a long time of shouting, the young man left the apartment. We sat in our room, panic-stricken, silently waiting for our fate, waiting for the Gendarmes to come for us. But they did not come. Why he did not report us that evening, I do not know. Maybe he was afraid that his mother would be accused of hiding the Jews; maybe he wanted to give his mother a chance to send us away, or maybe his mother somehow convinced him not to report us. In any event, it was a miracle.

The landlady never said a word to us. The next day, without saying good-bye, she left for the countryside. By now she must have been sure that we were Jews. She knew that we had heard her son's screaming and she probably was hoping that we would leave to save ourselves. Today I want to believe that she felt sorry for us. As I am writing this, I wish I would remember her name; I wish I could have some answers, and maybe thank her.

A couple of days later, as if by another miracle, Ervin came to tell us that through Terry he received a message from our grandparents. A Slovak guide would come the following Thursday to take us to Slovakia. We hoped and prayed that nothing would happen until then. Although we knew that so many Jews, including our young brother and members of our family, were caught while trying to cross the borders, we were so desperate that we had no alternative but to try it.

Thursday morning the Slovak man arrived and brought us three railway tickets for the evening train (Ervin did not want to leave Budapest). As the man left, without discussing with us any details of our escape, he took with him the small suitcase that we had packed, and told us to meet him at the

railroad station. In the late afternoon we walked out from the apartment without any packages, as if we were going for a leisurely walk. Further from the apartment we boarded a trolley toward the dreaded Keleti (East side) railroad station. This was one of the two main railroad terminals in Budapest and was heavily guarded by the Nazis and the Hungarian Gendarmes. There was constant checking of identification papers, partly for political reasons, and in order to catch escaping Jews.

The station was a huge covered building. It was relatively dark inside since it was already early evening, and hardly any lights were allowed to be on. This gave us some protection. Still, we felt that we were about to enter a cage, where wild animals were waiting to jump on us.

Ervin came to meet us at the station, to say good-bye. What an incredible risk he took! There wasn't much time; we purposely arrived just before boarding. Hardly saying a word, we fought back our tears, and did not kiss or hug, so that we would not draw attention to ourselves. I cannot forget my mother's tormented expression; she must have sensed that she was seeing her son for the last time.

Silently, we stood next to each other for a few minutes, when the Slovak guide, standing a short distance from us, started going toward the train and we had to follow him. I was sad at leaving Budapest. Not the city where for the last four agonizing months we so desperately tried to save our lives, but the Budapest of wonderful memories from years past, memories of theaters, concerts, operas and museums. I felt that we were departing from our old world forever.

How ironic it was that during that dreadful summer of 1944, the weather in Budapest was almost always beautiful. Set against the backdrop of the lazy, sunshine-filled summer days was the sharp contrast of our fearful hearts, our constant dark and helpless mood.

Shouldn't it have been a rainy, stormy summer? Shouldn't the skies have cried with us?

CHAPTER FIVE

The train was crowded. Our Slovak guide sat down a few rows in front of us, so that we could see which stop he got off at and follow him.

These Slovak peasant men lived in border villages and were familiar with the countryside. They knew when a section of the border would not be patrolled by border guards. Often they worked together with the guards to smuggle the Jews over the border for huge sums of money; it became a lucrative business for them.

Close to midnight we got off the train at a small village. How we got this far was G-d's miracle.

We followed our guide from a distance, and he was careful not to let it appear like there was any connection between us. Further away from the station when no one was around us anymore, he walked next to us. We walked to the end of the village behind the backyard fences of the small peasant houses. As we snuck by, dogs barked at us ferociously, like they bark at prowlers. We were terrified that the dogs would wake up the people inside or jump over the fence and tear us apart. Even today, I am frightened, and see ourselves sneaking behind those houses when I hear a dog bark in the dark of the night.

We left the village and came to open fields. It was a moon-filled night with dreaded silence. The air around us felt chilly and cold because we were wearing summer dresses since it was warm when we left Budapest and we had to dress accordingly so as not to arouse curiosity. My mother was wearing a pair of high-laced shoes. She had severe varicose veins (from her pregnancies, I was told), and her legs were always hurting. Evi and I, on the other hand, had sandals on, the fashionable wedgies, sandals with very high and narrow platform soles. We were not prepared for a long and difficult walk. It was the end of August and the fields were freshly plowed, ready for sowing the next spring or maybe even for that fall. The ground was rough and cloddy and with every step I took, my ankles wiggled because of the high platform sandals. I stumbled about, tripping over the clumps of earth. It was so terribly difficult to walk on the rugged terrain that we realized that Mother wouldn't be able to walk through the fields. Evi and I put our arms under Mother's, lifted her above the ground and carried her for hours stumbling through the fields, which were so vast and frightening, with an eerie stillness. Once in a while we stopped for a minute to rest and then we continued to walk through the night, without whispering a word. We were filled with terror to be out in the middle of nowhere in the dead of the night, three women with a complete stranger.

It was almost daybreak when finally we came to the end of the plowed fields, and from then on the ground was flat so Mother could walk on her own.

After a while our guide stopped to listen and told us that we were just about to cross over the Slovak border. There were no fences, and only a short distance away I saw a wooded area, a small forest. "That is already Slovak territory" our guide said. I was terrified and kept thinking that the border guards were lurking among the trees.

We were led through the forest, and coming out of the woods, we found ourselves by a main road. Our guide must have known this area very well because he led us directly to a nearby bus stop. It was getting light; it was early in the morning. There were a few peasants waiting for the bus. We looked very much like fugitives, our city clothes covered with dust, but nobody paid attention to us. The bus arrived shortly, and there were quite a lot of people on it, but again, no one gave us so much as a curious glance. Had G-d made us invisible, had He made us look normal in those people's eyes?

By the time the bus arrived at the main square of Nyitra - the small town where my grandparents were staying at the home of relatives - it was a bright and sunny Friday mid-morning. We walked a short distance to their house where the family was waiting for us anxiously. When we hugged each other, we cried and cried and could not stop. It was hard to control all the held-back emotions of the last few months and the previous dreadful night.

Shortly after we arrived, Mother went to bed. The veins in her legs had become inflamed and it was terribly painful. We stayed at her bedside and kept putting warm compresses on her aching legs. Seeing her resting in a comfortable bed, I knew that she would get better soon. I felt safe. It had been such a long time since I could feel that way. It was so wonderful being with some of our family again.

We felt safe that Friday, but the next day started another story.

Saturday morning we heard that the rounding up the Jews in Slovakia had begun. The police started to arrest the Jews who until now were exempt from deportation. By the afternoon, our family decided that we must try to get back to Budapest. Hiding in Nyitra would not be possible when there would be no more Jews there to help us.

Arrangements were made and as soon as darkness fell, a peasant man came with a horse-drawn cart filled with straw to smuggle us back to Hungary. Nine of us - my grandparents, my uncle Lajos,

his wife Feigi, their two year old daughter, my seventeen year old Aunt Vera, my mother, Evi, and I - climbed into the cart and lay down underneath the straw. In the cover of the night, we started our way back to Budapest, the dreaded city, which we had taken all risks to leave only two days earlier.

From the distance of so many years, I see ourselves, a small group of bewildered people with no way out, running in a circle desperately wanting and trying to save our lives against impossible odds.

The man drove us through some small villages and after a few hours of traveling, he stopped the wagon at a farmhouse. I am not sure whether it was his house or someone else's who was his partner in the human smuggling business. We were told that the attic would be our hiding place until we were taken further. In the dark, on the outside of the house, we climbed up on a tall ladder to reach a small opening to the attic where hay was piled up to the ceiling. We crawled into the hay and buried ourselves in it.

I think about my grandparents today. How were they, older people, able to go through all this? And how was my mother able to climb that height with her aching legs? And my aunt with the baby on her arm?

The woman at the farmhouse brought us some food and on our second day in the attic, probably for more money, she allowed us to come down and stay in the house. She told us not to make the slightest noise, so we did not speak or make a move. My aunt was holding my little cousin all the time. I have so many questions today. Didn't the child want to walk around? How was her mother able to control a two year old so she wouldn't make any noise? Did my aunt give her little girl some drugs to keep her quiet? Or, were those times when one expected a two year old to know that she is not

allowed to play, laugh, cry or walk around? I see that child with my mind's eye, clinging to her mother with a frightened, almost adult-like expression on her little face.

The couple was working during the day and when they returned, they told us that we can't stay in their house any longer.

Late that night we again piled into a horse-drawn cart and the peasant man drove us through some more villages. Arriving at a small forest in the early dawn, he told us to hide among the trees throughout the following day. He would come back in the evening to take us further during the night.

Why our attempt to get back to Budapest from Nyitra took much longer than when we came from Budapest, I do not know. It was our guide who chose the way and we were at his mercy.

It was raining, a steady drizzle; it was very cold. We stayed near the edge of the forest. My aunt lay down under a tree on the cold wet ground, put her little girl on her stomach, covered her with her coat, and the little girl fell asleep. Close to the forest was a corn field whose tall dense corn stalks we thought could give us more protection. Later in the day we one by one dashed through the short open field which separated the forest from the cornfield, and hid among the stalks of corn. After a few hours, my little cousin became very hungry. She started to cry and we could not stop her crying. We had nothing to give her to eat. When we noticed a farmhouse in the distance, my aunt said she would go there to ask for some milk. I watched her anxiously from between the corn stalks as she walked through the open field toward the house. A peasant woman opened the door and soon I saw with relief that my aunt was returning with a container of milk.

It was still raining and we were cold and wet. We saw a haystack not far from the cornfield and decided to crawl into it to be protected from the rain. We would wait there until our guide would come for us in the evening. The haystack was round and huge, so all of us were able to hide in it. But

the peasant woman was watching and reported us to the police. We were hiding only for a short time when we heard men running and surrounding the haystack. They shouted for us to come out. As we crawled out I saw soldiers plunging their pitchforks repeatedly into the haystack to drive us out. It was a miracle that we did not get stabbed. We emerged, a pitiful group of people: Old grandparents, women, young teenage girls, a baby. The only younger man was my uncle. I wonder whether the soldiers felt any guilt that they had attacked us as if we were some dangerous, armed enemy.

The soldiers had come with a pick-up truck and ordered us to climb in.

It is strange, but I felt relieved. I was surprised that I felt that way since I always dreaded the thought of being captured. But I was so tired of running, of being a fugitive, of fighting for my life. I was tired of the constant minute to minute incredible fear of being caught. We tried everything we could to save our lives. But now, we would no longer have to make decisions which would determine the course of our fate. I felt that I was giving this responsibility over to G-d.

I could never have imagined what was awaiting us; I could never have imagined that from the nine of us, in a matter of a few weeks, I would be the only one who will still be alive. So at the moment I felt relieved.

The soldiers drove us back to the town of Nyitra, unloaded us in the courtyard of an official building - most probably the police station - and gave the order to climb down the stairs into the cellar. The cellar had a long dark corridor and off of it were some dimly lit cells. We were put in one of the cells where there were a few Jewish prisoners already. Two long wooden tables stretched the length of the room and next to them on each side were long wooden benches.

We had no food with us, and we were not given any. My mother begged for food from the other Jews, as they had been taken from their homes, and had some food with them. It was so hurtful for

me to see my mother begging, but she could not bear for her family to be hungry and she put aside her pride.

Since there were only a few people in the cell, there was room for my grandparents and for my mother to lie down on the narrow benches. The rest of us slept that evening sitting, with our heads on the table. From the next day on more and more arrested Jews arrived. The place got very crowded. There was no room anymore for my mother and for my grandparents to lie down. My mother's legs were swollen and hurting. Evi and I gave our places on the bench over to our mother so that she could stretch her aching legs. The others did the same for my grandparents. We sat on the floor, squeezed back to back, and when evening came we dozed off in this sitting position. Around midnight the door opened with a bang and a few soldiers came in. They looked around, pointed at some men and called to the men to follow them outside. A few minutes later we heard the agonizing screams of pain as those Jewish men were beaten and stabbed repeatedly. We sat terrified and silent; nobody dared to whisper a word. Later as those men were returned to our cell, their heads and bodies were covered with blood. The anguish of their families is impossible for me to describe. They tried to bandage them with whatever rags they had. They were helpless; they could not ease the pain of their loved ones in any way.

From that time on, we lived in terror, dreading the night to come. Our guards could torture us as they pleased, they did not have to answer to anyone.

The following night the soldiers returned. Again they selected a few men and the torturing began. And they came again the next night, and every night during our stay at this place. We were totally helpless, so defenseless; our only refuge was to pray. And I prayed as evening came; Please G-d don't let them select my grandfather or my uncle.

Today how can I possibly expect anyone in the free world to understand or even imagine our horrific fear of our guards? How can I expect anyone to feel the atmosphere of terror in that dimly lit cell as we sat squeezed together, fearing that one of our loved ones would be tortured next by those sadistic, evil humans?

During the day we were allowed to go out into the corridor. I sat down at the foot of the steps, leading to the outside world, from where I was able to see a small patch of the blue sky. I imagined that the sun was shining brightly up there, its rays splashing the inner courtyard with brilliant sunshine. But it was so dark where I was.

Sometimes a young man would come to sit next to me and we talked. Even in this dungeon-like, horror filled place, I was still able to look forward to having conversations with him. I still had the normal feelings of a young girl. Today, I find this both amazing and inexplicable.

After about a week, there was no more room for newly arrested Jews, so they transported us, the earlier arrivals, to a detention camp in the town of Szered.

The camp was enclosed with barbed wires. There were many wooden barracks, like stables, where horses and cows are usually kept, but these had been built for us, Jews. We were not considered to be human beings, so we were housed like animals. Upon our arrival, so many of us were jammed into each barrack - where a thin layer of straw covered the floor from wall to wall - that we had to push and shove to grab a spot for ourselves where we could lie down. Somehow our family was able to secure a small area on the floor where we could be together. It was so embarrassing as strangers - men and women - slept next to each other. Still, I thought, at least here we can stretch out on the floor for the night.

The next day we learned the rules. We were allowed to leave the barracks during the day and walk around within the boundary of the fences. We were fed from a soup-kitchen and although it wasn't much, at least we did not have to beg for food from fellow prisoners. There were workshops set up and everybody had to find work. Old people and children could stay in the barracks. I found work in the embroidery workshop where different kinds of needlework had to be done. Needlework had been my favorite hobby in the past, so I was satisfied. Strange how one can adapt to one's fate so quickly. Although we had to sleep on the floor and we had to stand in line to get our food, which was so little that we were hungry most of the time, at least we were together. I thought: This is not the worst place to wait out the end of the war.

I soon learned otherwise.

The second night, a short time after we went to sleep, the shrill sound of whistles pierced through the air in the dark night, and the loudspeaker ordered everyone out of the barracks. Just awakened from our sleep, we were confused, nobody knew what was happening. Soldiers burst into the barracks and chased us to the square in the center of the camp. In the midst of the panic and running, our family tried desperately to stay together.

The square was lit up by floodlights; the loudspeaker was blurting out the orders: "Start running, run in a circle." The soldiers were standing on the side with their rifles pointed at us and their vicious dogs barking at us. We ran around in a circle, which had no end or beginning and the loudspeaker was shrieking "faster, faster," when suddenly a new order was given: "Everyone turn around and run in the opposite direction." Throngs of people still continued to run forward, while others started backwards. We bumped into and knocked each other down, we stumbled and fell. The shouting orders to change direction, "Run backwards, run forwards" came more and more frequently, and the soldiers

started shooting blindly into the crowd. People trampled one another or were shot by the bullets. We were running like animals in a circus, as their masters crack their whips. Here, it was the soldiers' bullets that were making the cracking sounds. And the soldiers were laughing, relishing the sight of the terrified Jews running.

After some hours of this insane running, running in circles, we were ordered back to the barracks. By then I was separated from my family and as I was walking back alone I dreaded the thought that I might not find any of them there.

One by one members of my family came back to our barracks, but so many others did not.

The next morning I went to my workplace, a spacious room, where many women and girls were working. Often some soldiers came in, and walked up and down in the room, watching us as we worked. A young girl, about sixteen years old, set at the same workbench as me. I remember her so well and see her clearly to this day. She had thick dark hair, a beautiful peachy complexion, she was very pretty. Her voice was soft; her dark eyes were always smiling. Everything about her was so refined, so graceful. I remember her name and it will stay in my memory forever. We talked sometimes, so when one morning she did not come to work I was anxious to know why. I asked about her and was told that the previous night one of the soldiers took her into their barracks and she was raped all night by the soldiers. She stayed out of work for only a day - working was a must. When she came back, she did not talk, or look at anyone. Her face had become so tormented that she seemed not to be normal anymore. Later, she was taken with the rest of us to Auschwitz. I heard after the war, that she was shipped from Auschwitz to a work camp where she gave birth to a baby. I also heard that she had survived.

The soldiers came into our workshop many times each day. We lowered our heads and naively wanted to believe that if we didn't look at them, they wouldn't see us.

We were so vulnerable. There was no law to protect us, no place to turn to complain. The mothers were terrified for their daughters. Our life was a constant fear, a constant mental agony.

Where was the Red Cross to protest?

Where were the humanitarians, who today speak up even for the criminals?

I don't remember exactly how long we had been kept in Szered - about three weeks - when rumors started circulating that soon deportations would begin to a place named Auschwitz. There were unreal sounding rumors about gas chambers where people were taken in the belief that it was a bath-house in which they would take a shower, and where instead of water, gas came from the showerheads.

We feared the brutality of our guards in Szered, but we feared the unknown place even more.

A few days later the rumors of the deportations became a reality.

Early one morning, guards ran into the barracks, ordering us to gather our belongings in a hurry because we were leaving the camp. Shoving and beating, they chased us out of the barracks in the direction of the railroad tracks where a convoy of wagons - railroad cattle cars - were waiting.

As the hundreds of people were running in a big commotion, a lot of us had the same idea: When we would pass by an empty barrack, from which the people were already driven out, we would sneak in to hide there until the transport left. We were hoping that in the chaos, the guards would not notice us.

My mother, Evi, and I were still able to cling together, but we lost the rest of our family in the running crowd. The three of us ran into one of the barracks. We knew that it would only be a matter

of a day or two until the next transport would leave, yet we still had the urge to do something to save ourselves, to gain time, albeit for one more day. Our will to live was so strong that we began to think irrationally, and hoping against hope, we believed a miracle could still happen.

The guards pushed as many people as was possible into the cattle cars and when there was no more room, the rest were sent back to the barracks. Once we knew that the transport had left, we who were hiding went back to our places. To our happiness we found our family there; they also had been hiding in one of the barracks. Along with the joy we felt at seeing each other, there was the awareness of the next transport which was sure to come. But we cherished every moment that we could still be together.

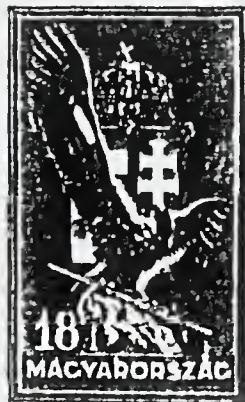
As we suspected, a couple of days later the cattle cars were again waiting for us. Once more we tried to hide in an empty barrack. This time however, there were less people left in the camp, so we could not elude the guards, and they drove us out of our hiding place. My mother, Evi and I were together, but in the mad race to hide we got separated from the rest of the family. Were they able to hide one more time and shipped to Auschwitz a few days later? Or, were they on the same transport as us but in another cattle car? If so, were they together with my mother and sister in their final moments as they were gassed? I will never know! I never saw or heard of any of these family members again. What I do know today is that everyone was deported from the camp in Szered.

We were marched to the railway tracks and ordered to climb into the wagons. As we were about to enter, I saw my mother handing a postcard to one of the guards asking him to mail it. She must have written it earlier; It was addressed to: Waczy Istvan (Ervin's Gentile name) Katona Janos ut 35, Budapest. On the postcard she asked Ervin in coded words to try to rescue us. She wrote in

aki Teri-hoz uat
 volna. Lehet hogy
 még az orvosai
 had málna-hat
 találhatóként
 egy kórház
 kórházban
 Feladó:
 Mária Nyír
 egyet

LEVELEZŐLAP

Ára 18 fillér.



Waczy István

Budapest

Ervin Waczy István

A copy of the postcard my mother sent to
 Ervin (Waczy István) from Sacred
 concentration camp.

Ides Dian Pööm enbrugg dipuolam!
 a vord ploo usien lēket saant se teuni. La est
 loq van ott valueni jō orwas aki tudua
 weg agy jō orvossagot a betes chnef hat-
 na jarulna an olapofanne dyadit
 dyruka kēht kōmja dēnnel ue u u
 es ue kaggy ite is eēti. Yuci uirvūki
 uue tairigot adēti. Eēht hētet uen
 fozom ofokytēti. Libaim uayon.
 fōtāq p' ugg uen tūttouf Puteken
 Baudi Būvihar uen uen uen uen
 uen uen uen uen uen uen uen



This is a picture of the cattle cars in which Jews were brought to Auschwitz.

Hungarian, translated, it read: "Try to send us a doctor because we are all very sick. Maybe a good medicine could still help, so that we could meet again." Even at that point, she did not want to give up the fight for our lives. She ended the postcard, "I send kisses to you with tears in my eyes."

Shockingly, the guard did mail the postcard. Waczy Istvan (Ervin) received this card in which our mother said good-bye to him forever and Ervin has it in his possession to this day. As I think about it now, I see how utterly desperate my mother must have been not to realize that this postcard could cause the arrest of her son.

More and more people were jammed into the wagon, until there was only room for us to sit on the floor, with our legs folded under us. As soon as it was not possible to push more people in, the doors were bolted from the outside. The three of us huddled together, Evi and I embraced our mother. We did not speculate anymore about where we were being taken. All we wanted was to be close to each other, so that whatever happened would happen to all three of us.

In the dark wagon the only way we could tell that it was daytime was through the tiny window in one corner below the ceiling. The air was heavy, the smell unbearable. There was a small pail in one corner for the people to relieve themselves. I went there once; The people were packed so close together that I had difficulty finding a little room to take each step without stepping on them. When I got there, I found the pail had overflowed and the people close to it were sitting in the human waste. After this time, through the rest of the journey, I could not bring myself to use the pail again. It was so inhumane, so degrading.

We had gotten nothing to eat or drink. My mother begged for some food from the people around us whenever she saw that they still had some left. She begged not for herself - she did not eat - but for

Evi and me. I was angry that she was begging for food. But now that I am a mother myself, I understand her better.

The three of us did not talk; We did not complain to each other or to G-d. I just wanted to sleep, to get away from this nightmarish reality. I put my head on my mother's shoulder and I slept most of the time. And so I escaped to nothingness, where I did not have to think or feel anything.

CHAPTER SIX

During the second or third night (we had lost track of the time) the train stopped and the doors were suddenly unbolted. We heard the most terrifying shouting, like humans barking: "Los, Los", ("Fast - Fast,") Soon I came to know that the shrieking of "Los, Los" was the sound one would constantly hear in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

After a few seconds, men wearing filthy striped uniforms and striped berets on their heads jumped into the wagons. They were Jews, we later learned, who had been in the Lager for a while already. They looked so strange; stooped, pale, ghostlike. They did not resemble anything I had ever seen before. They started pushing everybody out, while they kept on shouting, "Los, Los". Whatever else they said, we did not understand. They all shouted in different languages. We must have been told to leave all our belongings because as the people grabbed their suitcases the men tore them out of their hands and threw them on the ground in a pile. Now, I was sure that we would be taken to the gas-chamber, that we would be killed. We have to leave everything because we wouldn't need anything anymore, I thought. How could one live without a single possession?

Being pushed, we jumped down to the platform, my mother, my sister and I holding onto each other tightly, so that we would not lose each other in the turmoil. We were stunned, confused, disoriented. People were pouring out of the train as if the cattle cars would have vomited them out of their bellies.

There was so much noise; The shrill of the loudspeakers, "Los, Los," the crying of children, the hysterical screams of people trying to call out to family members from whom they had been torn apart in the chaos. There were flood lights, but all I could see the swarming of thousands of people.

The only thing important to me was that the three of us stayed together. Whatever our fate would be, I wanted us to face it together. I did not want to live without my mother and sister.

The order was shouted to form a column, five in a row, men separate from women, and start marching. Everything went so fast! Only a few minutes had passed since our arrival and we were already marching forward, with SS men standing in certain intervals alongside the marching rows.

Besides my mother, Evi and I, there were two other women in our row. They were a mother and daughter with the daughter being about my mother's age. They were on one end of the row, close to the train. Next to them, in the middle, walked Evi holding onto Mother on one side, and I was clinging to Mother from the other side at the end of the row. Suddenly, my mother said; "I see that young girls are being taken from the rows ahead us by the soldiers". My mother's voice was so bewildered, she was so horrified. She said: "I am afraid that they are taking the girls for the soldiers' entertainment." Having two daughters, she constantly was afraid of that; this was her nightmare.

I turned to my mother, to hear what she was saying, and was not aware of the SS officer standing next to me. Terrified, I felt his hand grabbing and twisting my dress on my chest as he yanked me from my mother's arms. He threw me with such force that I stumbled and found myself among a group of

girls who were standing a distance away. It took a second to regain my balance, and instinctively I turned to run back. But in that very instant, a thought, like a mysterious voice, flashed through my mind with lightning speed. It was gently but firmly ordering me to stop - "Don't run back. You won't find your mother and sister anymore." It was as if invisible hands held me back I did not move. I stood there bewildered, stunned: Is this happening to me? Was I thrown off of the earth into the depths of a dark planet? I stood there motionless as if my feet had become rooted to the ground, staring at the direction where my mother and sister had gone but I could not see them anymore. I only saw a mass of indistinguishable shadows marching toward a darkness. It seemed that they were marching into the wide open jaws of a giant beast, disappearing into its darkness forever.

The platform was cleared in a very short time, and so this transport, like all the other Jewish transports, was taken care of with the extreme German precision.

I was now among young girls who seemed to know each other, or at least each of them knew someone. They were from Slovakia and they talked to each other in the Slovak language, which I did not understand. The minute the SS. tore me away from my mother, all that was familiar was torn away from me. I was alone in this strange, frighteningly unearthly place. There was not one person whom I had known before, who would have helped me to hang onto the past. I don't understand how I did not become insane.

The Germans did not waste time, and soon we were marching ahead five in a row, as was the rule of the Lager. My world became the dark universe of Auschwitz. I saw the barbed wires and it seemed that nothing existed beyond them. It seemed that a nothingness enveloped this place; an empty

vacuum in which we would float forever and ever. It was as if we were a people with leprosy, isolated here on this planet called Auschwitz.

As we marched ahead in the silent night, I saw rows after rows of barracks; they looked like huge, dark coffins. The place looked like a vast cemetery.

The only thought in my mind was my mother - the horror she must have felt, when suddenly she noticed that I was not at her side anymore. It must have torn her heart to pieces! Did she call out for me? Did she run after me? Did she and my sister lose each other because of that? Or was she also so stunned and confused, as I was, that she just kept on marching ahead? Her last words to me were how worried she was for us, her daughters. She must have gone out of her mind when she realized that in a split second I was gone. These thoughts tormented me then, and at these thoughts, tears fill my eyes, and I feel a stabbing pain in my heart, even today so many years later.

We marched ahead and I thought only of my mother's agony. She went to her death fearing the worst for me. And from then on she was watching over me.

After a while, we arrived at a brick building. We filed into a cold, empty room. It was lit up; the walls were white; it looked like the entrance to a bath-house. We were about two hundred girls selected that night from the hundreds of women of our transport, whom the Nazis judged to be useful to Germany. The girls were all young, the youngest a fourteen year old, whose two sisters succeeded in pulling her with them. There was one mother in her early forties, who managed to come with her two daughters.

We stayed in lines, five in a row. The order was shouted: "Everyone undress, fast, completely!" All of us were wearing layers of dresses and layers of underwear and despite the constant shouting



The electrically
charged barbed
wire fences.



A barrack



Rows of
barracks

"Los! Los!" the undressing began in slow motion. I took my clothes off slowly, piece by piece, stopping in between, looking around to see what the others were doing, whether they were leaving the last piece of underwear on. I stopped and many others did, by the last pair. But the shrilling, thunderous, frightening order, echoing in the room, continued "Los, Los! Take everything off."

Naked, and embarrassed, we didn't dare to look at each other. We hunched over, frantically trying to cover ourselves with our arms and hands. In the past, I would never show myself naked even in front of my sister.

In my embarrassment I kept staring at the floor, when I heard the quiet, desperate voice of the girl next to me asking if I would change places with her sister. They had become separated from each other and her sister was now two rows behind us. (The girls, coming from the part of Slovakia which once belonged to Hungary, all spoke the Hungarian language more or less, so when this girl saw that I didn't understand Slovak, she spoke to me in Hungarian.) I changed places with her sister; it did not matter to me where I was standing. As I got to my new place, I was asked again to change places with someone, who was either a friend or a relative. I moved further to the back but now I felt that, besides all the horrors we shared, I was more miserable by being so alone. Everybody else had someone whom they wanted to be with, but there was no one who would wanted to be with me. I knew that soon we would be taken to the shower room, where either water or gas would come from the showerheads. I remembered the rumors we had heard in Szered about the gas chambers. I was not afraid of dying anymore. But I was afraid to die so alone. The other girls would embrace, would hug each other; but I would disappear from this life all alone. At that moment I only wished that I could hold and squeeze someone's hand when I would be gasping for air.

"Are you here by yourself?" asked the girl standing next to me when she saw tears streaming down my face. "Yes," I answered, and she told me that she was also alone.

The girl was Aliza (Lici) Kallos, whose family had lived in Dunaszerdahely, Hungary. When the Germans took over the country, Lici's parents had sent her to be with her grandmother in Slovakia, where they thought she would be safe. What happened to her mother, father, and brother she did not know. She was taken to Auschwitz with her grandmother from whom she was separated upon arrival. All this she told me later. Now she only said: " Let's stay together from now on."

It seemed that an angel had spoken those words to me. I now believe that I was guided next to Lici by my mother, who was already an angel in Heaven. From that moment on, Lici and I became inseparable; we became Lager-Sisters. It was as if we had known each other all our lives, which in a sense was true. The past was non-existent for us anymore. All the bizarre happenings of the last few hours, the sudden separation from our families, the shrieking " Los Los", the nakedness shocked our minds to forget the life we had before.

Although Lici and I could not ease each other's hunger and miseries throughout the nightmarish times, we would always try to be next to each other, whether it was during the long hours of standing for "Cahle Appell" or going into the showers which could have turned out to be the gas chamber. Knowing that I belonged to someone saved my sanity. I know today that I could not have survived the Lager without Lici's friendship.

Being so devastated by the thought of dying alone, I had not noticed that ahead of us there were two women - one standing and the other sitting. As our line moved forward, the one standing was shaving the girls' heads, and the one sitting was shaving the hair on the girls bodies. After that, the girls did not

look like living humans anymore. Naked and bald they were moving around like ghosts, bewildered, in a stupor from embarrassment. They all had the same expression: Daze, confusion, shame, humiliation. My turn came, and the next minute I was just like them.

Now we were totally dehumanized. The Nazis had taken away everything we had: Our families, all our worldly possessions. And by shaving and shearing us they stripped us of our self respect. We felt that we were nothing, nobody anymore, and we ceased to exist being who we were before. We became ghosts in this hellish place. And as if they would have shaved away part of our mind, we stopped thinking and just followed orders.

The two women finished their work, and we were led into the next room, where I saw rows of showerheads above us in the ceiling. We stood in line underneath them, Lici and I next to each other. I stared at the ceiling and waited to see whether water or gas would come. It made me know for the rest of my life how it feels to be face to face with death. Then I saw the first drop of water and I knew that I was not going to be killed, at least not for now.

Dripping wet from the shower - there was nothing to dry ourselves with - we were ordered into the next room, where a few people started to throw some "clothes" to each of us. We put those rags on as fast as we could. Finally, we were not naked .

I caught a light blue silk summer dress which was a few sizes too big on me. Most of us got only a dress, but I was "lucky", and was also thrown the dirty outer shell of a long black coat, with a bright red stripe emblazoned on the back. It must have been worn before me by a now dead prisoner. The lining of the coat had been torn out, when the SS were looking for hidden valuables. Today in my mind's eye, I see myself looking like a medieval monk wrapped in that big, long, black coat, but at that time I felt lucky since it would give me some warmth. I also caught a square piece of cloth, a

bandanna, which I immediately tore into two triangular pieces, giving one piece to Lici, and we both covered our heads. We were the only ones who could cover our bald heads, and that meant so much!

We were dressed now, but we all looked like pitiful, tragic clowns. The dresses were either too big or too small on us. These were clothes that had been taken away from people, brought to Auschwitz in previous transports. The seams and linings were ripped open to see whether money and jewelry were hidden there. And plenty was found!

It was still night when we left the bath-house, and were taken to a wooden barrack in Birkenau. On our way - in the distance - I saw a huge fire shooting toward the sky. In the dark of the night I could not see where it was coming from. The fire seemed to be hanging in the air, its flames trying to reach the black sky. And something made me look at those flames constantly. I later learned that on that night they were already burning the bodies of the people from our transport. Among them was my mother and my sister. But I did not know this then. I kept believing that they were in another part of the Lager, where families were together, and that I would see them again soon.

The barrack that we were taken to was long and narrow. There were bunks on three levels consisting of wooden planks. This barrack was empty upon our arrival, so there was more than enough place for everyone. The other girls huddled together to keep warm and to calm each other. Lici and I ended up by ourselves on one of the bunks and if not for Lici, I would have been all alone that first horrible night in Auschwitz. A few hours before Lici and I did not know each other, and now, we had only each other. I was so exhausted physically and mentally that despite the cold and the hunger - they had not given us anything to eat - I fell asleep. And I had a dream. In my dream I saw my uncle Moritz



A barrack in Birkenau.



The bunks.

Pictures I took when I went back to Auschwitz in 1994.

The first day, a girl climbed up to my bunk. She had recognized me at the time we were brought into the barrack. She was from my hometown; we used to live on the same street, but since she was a couple of years older than me, and we had attended different schools, we only knew each other by sight. Still, she was very nice to me. She had been deported to Auschwitz back in May and now had a position in this barrack as one of the Stubendiensts, the helpers of the Blockaltester (barrack supervisor). Each barrack had one Blockaltester, a Jewish girl whose job was to carry out the Nazis' orders. With some exemption, these girls were very cruel toward their fellow Jews. There were a few Stubendiensts in each barrack who, among other duties, brought the food from the kitchen and distributed it. Physically, theirs was a hard job, carrying the huge, heavy kettles from the kitchen, quite a distance away. But their job came with privileges: They had more food than the rest of us, and were able to give extra portions to members of their families and to their friends.

We had been given a metal soup bowl and a metal spoon. These became very precious to us. I held my bowl and spoon against my chest underneath my dress. I kept them from falling down with a belt I made by tearing off a strip of cloth from the hem of my dress.

The Stubendiensts ladled the soup into our bowls, and they developed an ability to quickly glance up to see who is next in the line. If it was a family member or a friend, the ladle would contain lots of potatoes in the sandy water, otherwise it would contain only sandy water, with hardly any potatoes in it.

The girl from my hometown (I no longer remember her name) brought me a bowl of soup full of potatoes. When I tasted it, and felt that it was also full of sand grinding under my teeth, I could not swallow it. "In a day or two, you will be so hungry that you will get used to it and you will eat it." she told me.

At that moment, the soup meant nothing to me. All I wanted was for her to tell me where my mother and sister had been taken. "Where are they now?" I asked her. She stayed silent for a minute and looked at me with an astonished expression as if thinking: Doesn't she know what this place is? In Auschwitz no one cared to spare one's feelings. Annoyed, she simply said to me: "Did you see the fire last night? That is where they are."

I refused to believe her!

She told me that I could stay with her in the part of the barrack where all the Stubendiensts stayed. She took me to her place where, instead of ten girls, only the two of us would share a bunk. It had a feather quilt for a mattress, pillows, and another feather quilt for a cover. People had brought those along and were taken away from them as they arrived in Auschwitz. The girl left for work and I stayed on her bunk alone. I was comfortable, but so miserable being alone that after a few hours I went back to the place where Lici was. Had I stayed, my fate probably would have been worse. I might not have been shipped out from Auschwitz at the time I was. I might not have survived.

A couple of days later, we were transferred to another barrack still in the "C" Lager. Our days in the Lager started way before dawn when the sound of a whistle and the shriek of the Blockaltester woke us up and we were driven out to the front of the barrack. There we stood for Cahle-Appell in squads, rows of five abreast to be counted, as did the women from all the other barracks. Each Blockaltester counted the hundreds of women from her barrack over and over so as not to make any mistakes. Then the numbers were added together and were given to the SS. If the numbers did not add up to what they were supposed to be, the counting started all over again, until the mistake was found. We stood for Cahle-Appell twice a day for hours and hours in the cold rainy Polish autumn weather. Many among us fainted, either from being sick or being weak from hunger. The others who stood

near tried to hold them up so that their head would be counted. Those who fell and were noticed were taken out from the lines and sent to the gas chamber.

When the counting was finally over and we went back to the barrack, the Stubendienst distributed our small ration of bread and a ladle of black coffee. The coffee was only dark water, and contained a chemical called brome, which stopped our menstrual cycle.

We were not taken out for work. We lay on our bunk, squeezed together, hungry and thirsty, our bodies aching from the wooden planks. Once a day, in the afternoon, we were led to the latrine - a long line of holes in a cement block. We went mechanically when we were told to, and then we stood for Cahle-Appell again which lasted for hours. We were counted and recounted again and again the second time each day. I don't know where or how the Nazis thought we could escape, that they counted us twice every day.

In the evening, when we got our bowl of soup, I was desperately hoping to find some potatoes in it. After only a few days in Auschwitz, not only was I eating the soup full of sand, but I was also praying: "Please G-d make them drop some potatoes in my soup." This became my everyday prayer.

It must have been our brain's self-defense, in order not to go mad - or was it the brome in our black coffee - that made our minds grow dull, our memories fade into a fog; We no longer thought back to our previous life. We only thought about the cold, the Cahle-Appell, our hunger, and the potatoes.

We lived in a world where horrors became everyday happenings. The sound of someone moaning woke me up one night. It would stop for a while then it would start again. As time went on, it became more frequent and sounded like muffled painful screams. One of the young women who had been pregnant at the time she was deported to Auschwitz was giving birth to a baby. It was almost



The latrin
(toilets) in
Auschwitz

84 x 46.

time for Cahle-Appell when the moaning stopped, but there was no baby crying. To save the mother, the girls who had helped her and had stifled her screams, choked the baby as soon as it was born. Otherwise, mother and child would both be sent to the gas chamber. The "new mother" then stood for Cahle-Appell with the rest of us.

There were also suicides.

We had been in Auschwitz a few days when a young mother ran out of our barrack, threw herself against the electrically charged fence that surrounded the Lager and died instantly. She had given her small children to their grandmother when they arrived in Auschwitz in the belief that they would be taken to a family Lager. Instead, she now knew that the elderly and the children had been taken directly to the gas chambers. She was among the many mothers who did not want to go on living without their children.

Soon selections started. "Selections", uttered in the many different languages of Europe, was the most dreaded word in the Lager. It evoked a horrible fear, unknown to the rest of the world.

It was in our barrack where the most drastic selections of all, the selections of the fall of 1944 were held. Hundreds of women were brought into our barrack daily. Order was given to undress, and we were jammed to the back of the barrack, our naked bodies compressed together. Suddenly, among the sea of bald heads I spotted the face of Kato Breiner, a girl I used to know in the boarding school in Budapest. For a brief moment, pictures of my old life sneaked into my consciousness. I tried to squeeze myself closer to her, to talk to her, to see if she was real, but it was impossible and I lost sight of her. As her face disappeared into the crowd I became detached from my past again.

The selections began with the naked girls lined up in a single row on the narrow platform, about a foot high, which ran down the middle of the barrack. It was the same platform that the coffee or soup kettles were placed on at food distribution time. During the selections it was used as a runway, where the line of girls slowly moved forward. Three SS officers were standing at the end of the platform and I learned later that one of the three was Dr. Mengele. They inspected each naked girl and made their judgment as to whether she was still strong and healthy and capable of doing hard work, or looked weak and ill and was ready for the crematorium. In a matter of seconds it was decided who would live and who will die.

But it wasn't always health that determined who would be selected. If the SS noticed any resemblance between the prisoners, and suspected them of being related, one was surely selected to die. This was one of their savage acts: To tear families apart. Therefore, relatives learned never to line up close to each other.

I was not afraid of dying anymore and since no one from my family was with me whom I would have feared to be selected, my horror was having to parade naked in front of the SS men. I was painfully ashamed of it. We were not allowed to shield ourselves even with our hands.

As we passed in front of the SS men, Dr. Mengele, with a stick in his hand, pointed at each girl to step off the platform either to the right or to the left. If it was to the left, we knew: She had been selected for the gas chamber.

The horror that followed, especially when it was someone's mother, daughter, or sister who had been selected, is not possible for me to describe, no matter how I try.

The condemned girls did not go quietly to their death! They cried and begged for mercy, to have their lives spared. Their loved ones ran to them, embraced them and pleaded to be allowed to die

together, but they were not allowed to. The Blockaltester and the Stubendiensts had to separate them, to pull them apart. It took a couple of people to drag each of the girls sentenced to die out of the barrack as she was fighting, kicking, scratching, screaming curses and screaming for mercy. When I close my eyes I can still hear them pleading that they are young, strong and able to do hard work. I can still hear their cries which will echo over Auschwitz forever.

The SS men stood nearby and continued the selections as if they did not hear or see anything.

It was then, for the first time, at the first selection, that I did not mind that my mother and sister were not with me. I thought: G-d spared us from the horrific pain when we would have to witness one of us being dragged to our death. I still refused to admit to myself that my mother and sister had already been selected at our arrival. I still wanted to believe that they were taken to another Lager, to a better place.

The selections continued almost daily. The Nazis were in a frenzied hurry to feed the crematoriums before the war would come to an end. (A few weeks later two of the crematoriums were blown up by sabotage.)

Having been in Auschwitz only a short time, Lici and I were still in good physical condition, and we both passed all of the selections.

At the end of October, the selections in our barrack stopped and those of us who still remained were told that we would be taken to the showers and would be transferred to another part of Birkanau. The thought that they were fooling us and the showers would turn out to be the gas chamber - as the Nazis had done many times - flashed through my mind, but since death was so common in the Lager, it left me calm. Lici and I were always together and I knew we would hold hands. I would not die alone.

It was a cold but sunny day - sunshine was rare this time of the year in Auschwitz - when we were led by the Blockaltester out of the barrack. She was constantly screaming, shouting: "Los, los" when I suddenly felt a tremendous blow across my face. She hit me so hard, it felt as if she had an iron fist. My ears started to ring and although the sun was shining, everything turned dark in front of my eyes. Besides the physical pain, I was astonished: Why did she do it? Why did she hit me? She had no reason for it. But in this place, nothing had to have a reason. She hit me because it had become a habit to her as it had to most others who were in power, and I happened to be near her.

Miraculously, I was able to continue to walk; I knew I had to if I wanted to live.

This was Auschwitz: Brutality, suffering, death, miracles.

It is still unexplainable to me today why had we been taken to the showers, since after the showers we were placed into one of the filthiest barracks in the Lager. This was a vast structure, with many hundreds of women prisoners in it already. Most of them were sick, were vomiting and had diarrhea. They vomited into their soup bowl, then emptied it on the floor or wherever they happened to be and took their soup in the same bowl at the next food distribution time. There was no way they could have washed it.

It did not take long for many of us new arrivals to become sick also. But somehow I stayed well. It was another miracle; it was my parents watching over me.

The bunk where Lici and I found places for ourselves was again on the third level, among some Russian women. These women were not Jewish; they were either political prisoners or criminals and were robust and very mean. Lici and I were hollered at, and given orders in Russian, which we did not understand. This made them so angry that they kept on pushing and hitting us.

This place was truly Hell.

Locked in this barrack, we were not taken out even to the latrine. Instead, in one corner, there were three or four big barrels where the women went to relieve themselves.

The smell was sickening!

With hundreds of women in the barrack and most of them having diarrhea, there were always long lines of people all around the barrels waiting for their turn. I got to the barrel which was taller than me and I practically had to climb up it. When I finally sat down on the narrow edge - where many of us were sitting around at the same time - the women who crowded around the barrel, pushed forward, and shouted: "Hurry, hurry, get down." I was holding on real tight with both my hands, scared that I would be pushed into the barrel, and I would drown in the human waste. This became my nightmare! So, when a couple of days later I heard that those who carry out the full barrels to empty them, are allowed to go to the latrine, I volunteered to do it. But it was not easy. The barrels were huge and extremely heavy. Each had to be carried by two girls a far distance from the barrack. It was raining every day and the ground of the Lager was all mud. Mud was everywhere. Our shoes, a wooden clog - which had only a front part and no back - got stuck in the mud and had to be yanked out at every step. This caused the barrels to shake and the contents to spill over.

One day, one of the two girls, who were carrying a barrel in front of me, slipped in the mud, pulling the other girl with her and the whole contents of the barrel spilled over the two of them. We, behind, had to continue to walk on. I have no idea how those girls were able to clean themselves.

Despite the real possibility that this might also happen to me, I volunteered every day to carry out the barrels. I did it just to get out of the barrack and to be able to sit down on a latrine as a human being. We were miserable in this filthy place and suffered during the long hours of standing for Cahle-Appell in the cold and rain. The thought that I will have to live like this forever was unbearable.

Some weeks later, toward the end of November, a group of girls, Lici and I among them, were gathered together by the Blockaltester. We did not know what would happen to us, what the plans were for us. But by this time, we followed orders without any thinking. We could have been selected for the gas-chamber but ours was a lucky group of girls. We were to be transported to an Arbeits-Lager (Work-Lager). These Lagers, which provided the Jewish slave workers for the Nazis, were scattered all over Poland and Germany.

At that time I did not know how fortunate I was to be in that transport, to be shipped out from Auschwitz to a Lager, where although life would be harsh, survival would be possible. Our group -some of them the Slovak girls with whom I was deported from Szered - was marched out of Birkanau to a railway station. Foggy pictures from the past drifted into my mind, when I saw the passenger trains (not cattle-cars) sitting on the tracks. Am I returning to Earth? - I thought.

After boarding, we found ourselves in the first-class section of an old run-down train where the seats, albeit torn, were upholstered, and where the cabin was divided into small compartments. There were no other passengers besides us, and so there were enough seats for all of us to sit. With our shaved heads, our ragged, ill-fitting clothes, and our soup bowls stuck under our dresses, we looked so comical in this "luxury "surrounding, as if it would be a scene from a tragic-comedy.

We traveled a whole day. The ration of bread that we received early in the morning was long gone and we were given no more food that day. Hungry, but intoxicated with the little freedom that we had been allowed to move in and out of our compartment, we ran from one window to the next to take in the sight of another world. It was already evening when we arrived at our destination. The sign on the small railroad station read : "Bad-Kudova."

CHAPTER SEVEN

After a whole day of traveling, we disembarked and formed ranks, five in a row. There was no screaming "Los, Los"; this screeching sound was left behind in Auschwitz.

It was a cold and rainy evening and we were soaking wet by the time we came to a small Lager. There were only a few wooden barracks and I immediately noticed that they had windows. A hopeful thought passed through my mind: This might be a better place than Auschwitz.

We filed into one of the barracks and stood in line in the long corridor. Off the corridor there were rooms where we would be staying. This was the first time since my capture that I could call the place where I would be living a room.

With the doors open, I looked into the rooms. In each, I saw five or six bunks on two levels. They had straw-filled mattresses and straw-filled pillows, so I could even call them "beds". There was a wooden table with benches on both sides where I would be able to sit while eating my bowl of soup, as humans do. A small iron stove stood in one corner of the room - for heating, I hoped - and there was a window! The rooms were small. They looked friendly, except for one, the last one, which was huge with many bunks, and reminded me of Auschwitz.

At the end of the corridor, behind a desk sat an SS woman, a pen in her hand and paper in front of her. She asked each of us some questions, and marked down our answers. She asked me:

"What is your name?" "Kupferstein, Agnes", I answered.

"What is" - or did she ask - "What *was* the name of your mother?" "Grunberg, Anna."

"What is" - or did she say - "What *was* the name of your father?" "Kupferstein, Izidor."

"In which country were you born?" "Hungary."

As I was answering her questions, I felt I was giving this information not about myself, but about someone whom I used to know many years ago, or maybe in another lifetime. It was so hard, a physical struggle for me to utter my parents' names. I had buried those names deep in my memory; it was painful to recall them. I had not thought about my family for a while now and it hurt so much to remember.

It seemed so strange that we were asked for information about our identities. It seemed strange because it was so civilized and I was not used to it anymore. Why would she want to know who I used to be? I am not that person anymore. Why are those statistics being taken? - I wondered. No one is making the Nazis accountable for what they do with us.

The SS woman gave each of us a "necklace". It was a string, strung through a small circular shaped piece of rubber which had our prisoner number printed on. We wore these around our necks. I kept this "necklace" for many years after liberation, but eventually I misplaced it. Decades later, in 1992, upon my request, I received a letter from the International Tracing Service stating my prisoner

number: 86054 and also the exact date (November 28, 1944) of my arrival from Auschwitz to the Bad-Kudova Lager, part of the Gross-Rosen Concentration Camp.

Lici and I were among the last ones in line to get our numbers, and by the time we went to find a bunk for ourselves, the ones in the smaller rooms were all taken. Only the huge room at the end of the corridor, the one that reminded me of Auschwitz, was still empty. Wet, cold, and hungry the two of us lay down in one bunk trying to keep each other warm. This room, which could have held one hundred, only had a few girls besides us.

We had barely slept a few hours when around four o'clock in the morning the whistle sounded and the Lager Elteste called for Cahle-Appell. But this time, instead of outside in the cold, it was held in the corridor of the kitchen barrack. After receiving our bowl of black coffee with brome in it and the same small bread ration as in Auschwitz, the Lager Elteste divided us into work units.

My unit was led by a few guards out of the Lager, up to a nearby mountain. Our job was to dig trenches that I assumed were in preparation for the Germans to fight their enemies when the front moved deeper into Germany.

An icy drizzle with blowing winds was constant as we worked all day, still wearing the clothes we had received in Auschwitz: The flimsy dresses, no underwear, our bare feet in wooden clogs. It is inexplicable how we did not become deathly sick.

Frozen, we returned to the Lager in the late afternoon. There was roll call again and finally we could line up for our bowl of soup. Here, too, the girls who distributed the soup used the same skilled technique as their "sisters" in Auschwitz. Since the potatoes sank to the bottom of the kettle, they stirred the soup, so the ladle would be full of potatoes for their relatives and friends. For the rest of us, they gave the liquid from the top with barely any potato. (Here, thankfully, there was no sand in

the soup.) I prayed as I did in Auschwitz: "Please G-d, move their hands, so that there should be some potatoes ladled into my soup."

That evening, Lici and I were alone in that big room; the few girls who had slept there the night of our arrival had found places somewhere else. Lici was sick - she had dysentery - and was in a state of complete apathy, but I was determined to find a place among the others and not be isolated from them. Going from room to room, I noticed an empty bunk. It belonged to a girl who was working the night shifts. She was in the Lager with her mother; their bunks were next to each other. I asked the mother if she would let me sleep there, since I would be leaving for work before her daughter returned. As soon as she agreed, I went to get Lici and the two of us shared the bunk. The mother was startled when she realized that suddenly two girls were taking her daughter's bunk, but she was kind and did not send us away.

During the night Lici and I needed to go to the latrine. Unlike in Auschwitz, we walked out of the barrack without any guards and went to the latrine not when we were told to, but when we needed to use it. I looked up to the dark sky and felt a sort of freedom.

Since Lici was sick, she was allowed to stay in the barrack the next day. When Vera, the girl whose bunk we slept in, came back from work in the morning, she found Lici sleeping in her place. But she felt sorry for us, because we were so lonely, and decided to share a bunk with her mother so that we could stay.

There were four sets of mothers and daughters in our Lager: Mrs.D. with her two daughters were in another room. The other three mothers, each with a teenage daughter, were in our room. Having these mothers around filled me with warm feelings, as if I belonged to a family.

Throughout the day, working in the mountains in the cold and rain - it was raining constantly - I thought only about the evenings, when I would return "home." The room in the Lager became my home, and I hardly ever thought about the life, and the home I had before. I totally accepted this miserable life, and I accepted that I would live like this until the day I would die from cold or from hunger.

Rita, the Lager Elteste, was in charge of us. She was the only Jew who had a position. There were no Kapos, Blockaltesters, or Stubendiensts as in Auschwitz. Besides the Kommandant, a German woman, there were SS officers and SS men and women who were our guards.

Rita was a pretty Polish girl in her early twenties. She was always neatly dressed in skirts and pullovers, her hair was bleached golden blond, she wore makeup, and she must not have been deprived of food, because she was on the heavy side. She distanced herself from the prisoners and had a close relationship with the Kommandant. But Rita was not mean to us, and while her friendship with the Germans was to her advantage, we also benefitted from it. She lessened our suffering when she was allowed by the Kommandant to hold Cahl-Appell in the kitchen barrack instead of outside in the sub-zero winter weather. She was also permitted to let those who were sick stay out of work for a few days. I believe that it was because of Rita that survival was possible in this Lager.

When the rain turned to snow we stopped working in the mountains. I, together with Lici, was assigned to another work unit. We started out for our workplace in the early dawn, when it was still dark. It was a brutal cold winter day, one on which in these times I would hear a television announcement: "Unless it is an absolute must, one should not venture out, for danger of frostbite", despite the fact that now-a-days, we can bundle ourselves in heavy winter clothes. But then, we were

marching in the blizzard, scantily dressed in the summer dresses - the rags which had been thrown to us in Auschwitz.

We marched through a deserted countryside. Fierce wind bit our faces and whipped our bodies like truncheons. The road was covered with a blanket of thick, icy snow and the soles of my wooden clogs froze to the snow. I had to twist the clogs at every step I made to dislodge them. The twisting and jerking made the thin wooden edge of the clog cut deeply and painfully into the front of my bare feet. Pieces of icy snow stuck to the soles until I felt as if I were walking on ice - skates. My ankles wiggled, and I was wobbling as chunks of snow broke off from the bottom of my clogs. From the pain and from my despair, tears were flowing from my eyes. I knew I would freeze to death by the end of the day if we would be forced to work outside.

I had not been thinking of my mother and sister lately. I had heard enough about the gassing of people in Auschwitz that my illusion that they were in a better Lager was gone, and my mind chose not to think of them. Shivering in the cold, and my feet hurting with every step, I was reminded of my mother's aching legs, how she would not have been able to endure this agony. I was grateful that she and my sister didn't have to share this suffering with me, that they were in heaven where nothing hurts.

I do not know how long we marched. Two hours, three hours, for us it was an eternity. It seemed it would never end. When we stopped, we were in front of a structure concealed in a remote place. It was painted white to be camouflaged in the snowy surroundings because it was a factory where aircraft parts were manufactured. Our new work place was a sheltered place!

For the next several weeks, both Lici and I worked in that factory. There the many machines were operated by men who were not Jews. The men were either prisoners of war or forced labor deportees from different countries in Europe. The Jewish girls had the job of sweeping around the machines to

keep the floors clear from the debris which had fallen off during the manufacturing process. Each girl was assigned to work around certain machines. It was forbidden to accept anything from the other prisoners; we were not allowed to talk to them or even to look at them. Our German guards were circulating constantly among the machines; we never knew when they were close by.

I kept on sweeping all day, my eyes always on the floor. When noon came, the men stopped their machines; it was lunch time for them. To our surprise, our guards allowed us to receive a bowl of soup, filled with potatoes and vegetables, the same as the men were getting. Every day, as long as we worked in the factory, we received the extra bowl of soup.

A couple of weeks later, our dresses, the rags, that had been thrown to us the first night in Auschwitz and which I had never taken off day or night since, were exchanged for the now well-known gray and blue striped uniforms of the "Haftlings", the Jewish prisoners in German Lagers. Our dresses and our underwear - the first pair of underwear since the day I had been taken to Auschwitz - were made from a coarse cotton material and were more or less the proper size for each of us. Our clogs were exchanged for shoes. Although these also had a wooden sole, they had a laced-up canvas top which made it easier to twist them off the ground when they stuck to the frozen snow.

Having a pair of shoes instead of the clogs, our march to and from our workplace became somewhat less torturous, and I was able to look at the surroundings. There was a picture-postcard view, a beautiful winter scene around me. Everything was covered with brilliant white snow, beautiful, pristine snow, that caused so much pain for us. There were small houses in the far distance. In the evenings on our way back to the Lager, I saw lights shining out the windows of the houses. Is it possible that families live in houses? Is it possible that families live together? - I thought. I kept looking at those houses with the lights inside and I envisioned happy parents and children together in a warm,

cozy home. Pictures from the past flickered in my mind, but now it seemed that they were never real. Were they only a dream?

The men in the factory felt sorry for us Jewish girls. One day, as I was sweeping around the machine of an Italian prisoner, I felt that he was staring at me. I was afraid to look at him, since we were not allowed to, but his stare was so intense, that for a second it made me look up. As he caught my eye, he quickly glanced at a spot on his machine, nodded his head slightly, and walked away. After he left, I went closer to his machine and where he had pointed with his eyes, I saw a hollow space. In there was a whole ration of bread! My heart started beating wildly. Should I dare take it? A guard might see me. Besides, did he leave it for me? Or was that where he always kept his bread? I was terribly afraid but so tempted! I swept and swept around the machine; I did not know what to do. But my hunger was stronger, and won over my fear. Suddenly, without consciously knowing what I was doing, faster than any speed on Earth, I grabbed the bread and hid it underneath my dress. Seconds later the Italian came back - he must have observed me from a distance - again nodded his head slightly, and then I knew that he had wanted me to have it. From then on, he often left a ration of bread at the same spot. Every time I took it, I knew what danger of punishment I was in, what serious risk I was taking, but my hunger was so painful, I was not able to resist it. Lici and the other girls also received some food from the political prisoners, whose machines they were cleaning around. I am certain that it helped us survive.

While the bread from the Italian nourished me physically, I was nourished mentally with the encouraging words of a French prisoner. He often passed by me and whispered in broken German, that our misery would soon be over. He would murmur names of German cities and I knew he was telling

me how far the Russian and the Allied forces had reached into Germany. I hungered for his words, almost as much as I hungered for the extra bread from the Italian. It did not enter my mind to get to know the names of those two prisoners. I did not believe that there would be a future, a time when I would love to know their names. But I will never forget them.

The weather continued to be below freezing, the biting cold did not let up. During our long march to work, I forced myself to think about the extra bowl of soup, the extra portion of bread and the French prisoner's reassuring words which somewhat eased the physical pain.

One evening as we returned from work to the Lager, we were told that we would not be going to the factory anymore. At this time a certain number of girls were needed in the kitchen. Along with a few others, I was chosen for the job of peeling potatoes and vegetables. I was really lucky; it was the best job possible. I didn't have to march for hours in the harsh winter weather, we received an extra bowl of soup, and while we were peeling the vegetables we could eat as much of them as we wanted to.

But this good fortune lasted only a few days.

Mrs. D., the mother who had her two daughters with her in the Lager, was also working with us. She wanted this job for one of her daughters. In order to accomplish this, she had to push out one of the girls already working there. She picked me because she knew she could not do it to any of the other girls. She started to find fault with the way I peeled the vegetables. True, I had never peeled a potato before but, except for her, nobody cared. She complained that I was too slow, and a few days later I was told not to come to work anymore. The next day, her daughter was working in my place. To this day, I am amazed that I survived those times.

As was the rule of the Lager, the girls without work had to line up early in the morning and the Lager Elteste would enlist them into new work units. We never knew where or what our new job would be. Would we have to work outside in the freezing weather? Or would we be lucky to get into a unit which worked in a sheltered place? Not knowing any of this, the best thing was to try not to get into any of the work units at all. And so, whenever a new unit was being assembled, the struggle to manage to get to the end of the line started among the girls. While at food distribution times Lici and I always found ourselves at the end of the line, when it came to being counted into work units, we always ended up at the front. The fast ones among us sneaked to the back, hoping that not all of us would be needed for work at that time. There were girls who in this manner were able to miss work many days, which in that harsh winter may have meant the difference between life and death. As for me, I never tried to change my place. I left it to fate, thinking that I might end up changing for the worse.

My next work place was at the Germans' canteen, where the food was prepared for the German guards and for the men who worked in the aircraft factory. The canteen was the same distance from the Lager as the factory, the same torturous march every day. We worked in the cellar, where potatoes and different vegetables were piled up. Our job was to sort out the ones that had started to rot so that they would not spoil the rest. Although it was cold in the cellar, at least we were not out in the blizzard. We were allowed to eat the raw potatoes and vegetables, but it was forbidden to take any with us back to the Lager.

The first day of work, at noon, we had a wonderful surprise: We got an extra bowl of soup, full of vegetables and potatoes.

This was one of the better work units!

When a work unit was assembled, Lici and I would always stand next to each other, so we worked in the same workplace most of the time . But Lici was sick again and once again she was allowed to stay in the Lager. Working for a few days in the canteen, I noticed that when we returned to the Lager in the evening, no one was checking whether we brought any vegetables with us. I decided to bring two potatoes back with me. Lici and I would roast them on the small iron stove in the evening, as I had seen other girls doing.

I was now carrying my soup bowl and spoon in a small bag. I had made the bag by tearing off a piece of cloth from the dress I got in Auschwitz at the time it was exchanged for the striped uniforms. Carrying my only belongings in that bag - instead of holding it to my chest underneath my dress - was my first step back to civilization.

I hid the potatoes in my bag and although I was scared that they might check us, the prospect of enjoying the roasted potatoes, and also hoping that it would help Lici feel better, overshadowed my fear. My heart pumped rapidly as we arrived in the evening at the gate of the Lager. But as in previous days, we were not checked and that evening Lici and I feasted on the two roasted potatoes.

Since everything went so well, I became more daring. This surprises me today, but I guess hunger can change one's basic nature.

The next day I hid four potatoes in my bag and couldn't wait for the evening to come, to roast them and share them again with Lici.

But that evening, the guard stopped our group at the gate, and asked whether anyone had brought anything from the canteen. Everybody remained silent. The guard asked us two more times. Could it be that she already knew? Could it be she had seen me putting the potatoes in my bag? During a fraction of the next seconds, ideas raced through my mind. Should I drop the potatoes on the ground?

But my bag was tied with a string and I knew that I would not be able to undo it fast enough not to be noticed. I also realized that I would have to tell the truth when they would see the potatoes laying on the ground in the snow. Should I just keep quiet, taking the chance that they might not search us after all? But what if they did, and they would find them? I was frightened like never before, but it became clear to me that I had no choice but to come forward.

I went up to the guard and told her that I had some potatoes in my bag. She made me follow her into the barrack where the Germans had their offices. As we entered the front room, she told me to wait while she went into the office of the camp's highest ranking male officer.

The fear I felt defies words! It is beyond description of any human feeling. The incredible fear of the Nazis' punishment, the anticipation of pain from violent blows, slapping, and kicking was itself torture of tortures ; it could lead one to insanity. I actually began to physically feel the pain and I started to pray. I called to my mother to intercede for me and to beg G-d for the miracle that I should feel no pain, no matter what would be done to me. Then I turned to G-d, and it was more than praying. I pleaded and demanded: I wanted to force Him to help me not to feel any pain. Was I asking to die from the first blow so that I wouldn't feel any more pain?

I was dizzy and shaking by the time I was called into the room where one German officer was sitting behind a desk. Next to him on each side, an officer was standing in the familiar, frighteningly powerful pose of the SS: Their arms folded across their chest, their shiny booted legs spread apart. It looked like they were ready to tear me apart.

In a foggy state of mind, I heard the SS officer, the one sitting behind the desk, asking me. "Do you know that it is forbidden to bring back food to the camp?" I must have answered his question but I do not remember how. He told me to put the potatoes on his desk. How I managed with my

trembling hands to untangle my bag and take the four potatoes out of it, is a mystery for me today, but somehow I did it. And he said: "Don't ever do this again."

I stood there waiting for the beatings to begin, when he told me "you can go now." Delirious, and on the threshold of unconsciousness, I stumbled out of the room, my legs carrying me mechanically back to the barrack. I knew that my prayers had been heard and a miracle had happened but my mind was not clear enough to determine whether I had been beaten and I did not feel any pain, or whether I had not even been touched. They let me, a Jewish prisoner, go without a single blow after I was found taking potatoes from the German soldiers?

I could make the point, that by this time the German officers already knew that Germany was on the verge of capitulation, yet we know from eye witnesses that until the very end of the war the Nazis tortured and killed those who would dare to steal a potato.

I am wondering today: Was I the only one that evening who had hidden potatoes, or was I the only one who came forward with it?

It was too late for me to receive my bowl of soup that evening. Reaching my room in the barrack, I slumped onto my bunk and sank into a deep redeeming sleep.

Did the others in the room notice that I had not returned after work? Was Lici worried? I can't remember talking about it. In the Lager, whatever happened was accepted as part of our condemned life.

I continued working in the canteen for a while longer. As the harsh winter was slowly coming to an end and the snow started to melt, our march to work was not difficult anymore. Working in the canteen, I got an extra bowl of soup every noon and I could eat the raw potatoes and vegetables during the day, but I was never again tempted to bring anything into the Lager.

In the early part of March, we stopped working in the canteen and so I no longer had the extra bowl of soup and the raw vegetables. My hunger pains were getting more and more unbearable.

The coming of spring brought mild weather but also new miseries for us. Rats, mice and lice invaded our barracks. Our hair which had started to grow back was now full of lice, as were our clothes and bodies. Our straw mattresses and straw pillows were ridden with mice and rats. At night I felt them as they raced wildly underneath me.

Days passed and a new work unit was assembled. At the sound of the whistle the girls who at the time were not part of a work unit had to line up. The Lager Elteste announced that fifty girls were needed. Lici and I would not have been counted in, because we were among the last ones in the line, but as soon as the announcement was made other girls quickly maneuvered to get to the back and as usual we found ourselves at the front. No one wanted to be in the new work unit. The Lager Elteste marked down the first fifty girls' prisoner numbers and we started out for our new work place.

We left the Lager in the predawn darkness, and we were still marching when the rising sun revealed the beautiful scenery around us; the lush green fields that spread into the far distance. Seeing the rebirth of nature made me momentarily forget our miseries.

There was a feeling of freedom on that tranquil, mild spring morning and I actually enjoyed our long march to our work site, a railroad embankment where damaged railways had to be repaired. Our job was to carry heavy rocks from the foot of the embankment to the top. We carried the stones all day long, while we had nothing to eat. The ration of bread we had been given in the Lager I had eaten during our march in the morning. I was exhausted, and terribly hungry; I had to drag myself on our

way back to the Lager. The one bowl of soup we got in the evening did not ease my hunger and I dreaded the prospect of the coming days.

On our way to work the next morning, the countryside still looked beautiful but it seemed cruel that there should be such beauty in a place where there was so much suffering. The work was hard and my hunger was so painful that by noon I did not know whether I could last through the day. And then something miraculous happened.

It must be only an illusion, a mirage, I thought, when the sight of a half dozen women coming toward us appeared on the horizon. Dressed in their native long, billowy cotton dresses, crisp white aprons, and headdresses, they seemed to float above the ground as each carried a big basket on her arm. These were Czech women - as we later learned - so we must have been somewhere close to, or in the Sudetanland. To me it seemed they had come from the faraway Planet Earth to our planet of misery.

The women approached our guards and offered them one of their baskets full of delicious baked goods, in exchange for being allowed to hand out the rest among us.

I must be dreaming I told myself, as I received the rolls and "buchtas" (small coffee cakes). Their aroma evoked memories of a world past, which I was sure was lost to me forever.

The next day at noon, the women came again, their baskets filled with delicacies. The news about this quickly spread in the Lager and now the other girls wanted to take our place. When our work unit was called in the morning they also lined up - this time in front. They would have succeeded in pushing many of us out, but only the ones whose number the LagerElteste read from her list were allowed to go. While we were working at the railways the wonderful Czech women came every day,

and with their freshly baked pastries they not only eased our hunger but possibly saved many lives.

Our job at the railways was finished at the beginning of April, and this was the last time I worked outside the Lager. None of us were taken to work anymore and we no longer had extra food. Our daily soup got thinner than before; it was now all water, hardly any potatoes in it. My stomach was hurting constantly from emptiness and my dress was getting bigger and bigger on me with each passing day.

Throughout the winter we did not know that the political prisoners' camp was next to ours. Their barracks were faraway, we could not see them, but the prisoners were allowed to move around freely on their camp ground. Now that the weather had gotten warmer, they often came to walk near our fences and as they passed by, they would call over telling us that Berlin was under siege by the Allies and that the Russian front was very close to us. Some days we could hear the faint ramble of Russian artillery in the distance.

All this should have made me hopeful, but I was not capable of having hope anymore. I believed that we were the only Jews who were still alive. I believed that the Germans would finally surrender and the war would be over, the Allies would go home and so would the Russians. But we would be held in this remote place; there was nobody left who would ever look for us, and we would be condemned to this life until the day we died from sickness and starvation.

By now the memories of my family and my life before had become so distant as if they would have never existed. Hunger took over my whole being completely, and the yearning for food was the only thought that I was capable of.

Our days passed with doing nothing else but searching for and killing the lice on our heads and our bodies. Then one morning our guards handed us some shovels and ordered us to dig a deep pit across the width of the Lager. Naively, I thought that we were preparing an army trench, from which our guards would want to fight the enemy. Instead, we learned that we were digging our own mass grave.

The ditch was completed in a few days, and at that time there were rumors that Hitler had committed suicide. But no one was sure whether it was true or not.

Were our guards waiting for the order to kill us, but Germany was in such deep chaos that orders could not reach the camps anymore? Did the order come but the Kommandant did not follow it? A few days later, not wanting to risk being captured by the Russians, our guards changed to civilian clothes and fled during the night. The Kommandant stayed.

Rita, the LagerElteste, called for Cahle-Appell. The Kommandant, still wearing the SS uniform, stood at Rita's side, and announced that the war was over and we were free to leave. Despite all the rumors we had heard lately about the impending collapse of the hated Germany, I still could not see a way out from the Nazi terror. Now the suddenness and the gripping simplicity of the words with which the Kommandant announced the end of the most horrible atrocities in human history stunned me. It took minutes until I realized that I had survived the Lager.

With a few simple words our horror-filled captivity ended. We were free. But there was no jubilant celebration. There was only the shattering realization of the irreversible, irreparable crimes committed against us: The killing of our parents, our families. A tragic reality was left and it forever altered our lives .

CHAPTER EIGHT

In orderly fashion we marched to the kitchen barrack, and we each received a whole loaf of bread, some sugar and shortening. In my soup bowl, I quickly mixed the sugar and shortening together into a delicious cream, and started licking it with my finger. As I passed through the gates to freedom, it was the relief from the pain of my hunger that made me happy.

We left the camp on the road where we had walked so many times on our way to work. Before, we had never seen a single person on it, but now it was crowded with retreating German soldiers on trucks and on foot. They were weary, their uniforms ragged, but their hatred toward us Jews still did not stop. They recognized our striped Heftling uniforms, they spat on us and cursed us; I was afraid they would shoot us, since they still carried their weapons.

I had no idea in what direction we were going. I had no idea what part of the world we were in. Lici and I always stayed close to each other, and just followed our group. I felt bewildered and I was frightened of the future. Will I find someone alive from my family or someone whom I used to know? A cousin, a friend or at least an acquaintance? I was free, but instead of being happy, I was scared.

How do I start life again? Where would I live? What would I live on? Auschwitz had caused the world as I knew it to disappear forever. I feared the new world I was heading toward, where there would be no one to whom I would belong. How will I, who was always so dependent on my family, be able to live alone in this new unfamiliar world? How will I be able to create a new life for myself? It felt as if I was being thrown into deep, turbulent waters, but I did not know how to swim. For now, I still had Lici, but as soon as we reached the Hungarian border we will have to part since our hometowns were in different parts of the country. I was going home, but I was scared that I would find no one there. I dreaded the thought of my future, and the terrible loneliness awaiting me.

Some times later we came to a highway. It was jammed with thousands and thousands of people. German soldiers who had been captured by the Russians were standing in groups, surrounded by their Russian guards. I felt satisfaction at seeing the terrified and humiliated faces of the Germans who were so mercilessly evil, and who just a short while ago had used their mighty power to torture and kill millions of innocent people.

The road was also crowded with political prisoners, and Jewish prisoners in their striped uniforms. I slowly realized that there were other Jews who had survived. We began asking each other: "Were you together with anyone from my hometown?" naming the cities we came from. We repeated this question again and again, hundreds of times. We shouted the names of our cities and villages into the crowd without stopping, hoping that somebody would answer that they knew someone from that place, hoping that the person might be from our family. We asked the same question to anyone in the striped uniform who walked next to us, or passed us in any direction along the road. This was the start of our search for our parents, brothers, sisters, relatives. Seeing that some Jews did survive the

death camps, I began to have hope that my father and younger brother might be alive, and that my older brother had been able to live through the war as a Christian in Budapest. Maybe I would find them. I had no hope for my mother and my sister. I knew that they were killed the first night we arrived in Auschwitz. That night I saw as the Nazis led the people toward the gas chamber, and my mother and sister were among them.

As I am writing today, I see two pictures in my mind. In both, huge masses of people are slowly moving ahead, like waves of an ocean. But what a contrast!

In the first picture I see people young and old, children and babies as they are arriving in Auschwitz. They are bewildered, their faces tormented. Everyone is dreading the future, the next moment. Although they are driven, "Los, los," they are reluctant to move ahead; they feel that this is the last road they will be taking.

In the other picture, I again see oceans of people moving on the roads. Their faces are hopeful; the road they are taking is toward a new beginning. But, I see no babies, children or old people. They are not coming back ; the Nazis have kept them forever.

In the late afternoon we arrived in a town. During our march, Lici and I had become separated from most of the girls of our group, but we made sure that the two of us don't lose each other in the crowd. The town was swarming with survivors. Soup kitchens had been set up to feed the people. School buildings had been converted to shelters. In the classrooms, straw was scattered all over the floor and we slept on it. Everyone was asking one another: "In the Lager, did you know someone from my hometown?" We never tired, we never stopped asking this question.

The next day we continued our walk and tried to find our way back home. Lici and I followed the people whom we heard speaking Hungarian, hoping that we were heading toward Hungary. We wandered many days and stopped in many towns. After a while, we came to a bigger city. Our Hungarian group settled in one of the school buildings and Lici and I followed them.

The school building was jammed with survivors. We could hardly move around. We continued to ask our questions: "Did you know anyone from Nyiregyhaza?" I asked. "Did you know anyone from Dunaszerdahely?" Lici was asking. Suddenly, a girl turned to Lici and said: "I was in the Lager with a woman from Dunaszerdahely and we are still together in another school building. We came here in search of surviving relatives."

"Who is the women from Dunaszerdahely?" asked Lici.

"Her name is Mrs. Kallos". the girl answered.

"She is my mother!" shouted Lici, and as if we would have been propelled out of a cannon, both Lici and I started running up and down the staircases to find her. Frantically pushing everyone in our way aside, we darted from one room to the other, from one floor to the next, calling out Lici's mother's name. I don't know how many times we ran through the building asking everyone if they know her. We ran up and down the floors looking for her and all the while I felt that I was looking for someone to whom I belong. Thoughts of what a wonderfully secure feeling it will be to be with a mother again, kept flashing through my mind when suddenly I saw Lici running toward a woman. I saw her fall to her knees in front of her mother, clutching and kissing her mother's feet, crying uncontrollably. Mrs. Kallos pulled Lici up, and they hugged and kissed, laughed and wept at the same time. The image of a mother and daughter finding each other will forever be etched into my memory. People crowded

around us and tears streamed down their faces. We cried and thought of our mothers. We knew that very few of us, if any, will ever embrace our mothers again.

I was standing near Lici and heard her mother say: "Come, we'll go to another building where I am staying with some women." Seeing her mother again, Lici was in a daze. It must have transported her back to her old life which I was not part of. That is the only explanation that I can have for why she turned to me and said, "I am going with my mother." She did not ask me to come along. There was no goodbye, no hugs; they simply left. Lici's mother did not even know who I was. I was just one of the girls in the crowd. I stood there numb, staring, as the only person I felt I belonged to, was disappearing into the crowd. For the second time since my deportation, I was left with no one. There were hundreds of people near me, but I belonged to nobody.

I had met Lici on that first awful night in Auschwitz when it must have been angels who guided me next to her, and in a matter of seconds she became my Lager-sister at the loneliest and most devastating time in my life. The abruptness of our parting seemed to be a signal to me, that the nightmarish life that Lici and I shared in those strange unearthly places, Auschwitz and the Lager, was over, and soon I will be home again.

Lici was more than a friend. She took the place of a sister in those darkest days in my life. Without her, I would have been subjected to many more hurts and mistreatment from the others for no reason other than, that I was alone. Knowing that we belonged to each other helped me endure the sufferings and helped me to survive. I will always cherish her friendship.

In the summer of 1945, when I was back in Nyiregyhaza, I received a letter from Lici through the "Joint", a Jewish organization. In the letter she told me that neither her father nor her only brother

had come back from Auschwitz. Later, in another letter, she sent a picture of her wedding and wrote that she had married Joseph Greenwald, the best friend of her late brother. I did not know at that time, how similar our married names would be when some years later I would be marrying Joseph (Tuli) Grunfeld.

In the two and a half years that I lived in Hungary after our liberation, Lici and I exchanged only a few letters, for in those days it took many weeks for a letter to arrive. Our correspondence stopped when I began to spend more and more time in Budapest in preparation for my immigration to America. We lost track of each other, and despite all my inquiries I could not find anyone who knew her whereabouts. Forty-eight years later, with the help of the American Red Cross and the Israeli Mogan David Adom, I learned that she was living in Natanya, Israel. I immediately called her on the telephone and she told me that she was already a great-grandmother. In 1994, my husband Tuli and I visited her in Israel. I found her to be a very young looking great-grandmother. We met her family: A daughter and a son and their families. "When my daughter was born, I named her Agnes because of you," Lici said to me. I realized then, that our friendship had just as deep a meaning for her as it had for me. Our reunion was special, but it would have been happier if not that her husband had passed away just a few months before.

After Lici left with her mother I felt a devastating loneliness. Forlorn, I wandered back to the classroom where the Hungarian group was staying and sat down on the floor, at the place that Lici and I had been sharing. Next to me, two girls, the Guttman sisters, started talking to me when they saw tears streaming down my face. We soon discovered that our hometowns were not far from one another. We also discovered that our families had known each other in the past; my mother had

A picture of Lici's
wedding in 1946,
which she sent to me
to Nyiregyháza.



Below is a picture of
Lici with her daughter
and son, when I
visited in Netanya,
Israel in 1994.



Enl'ehul soh mereddel' Aginok:

Lici-Josi:

Enl'ehul soh mereddel' Aginok.

Translated:

As a remembrance, with lots of love, to Agi

Lici-Josi

bought many beautifully embroidered linens from the girls' parents' business. This was the first time since my deportation that I found any connection with my old life, and it stirred up feelings which were buried so deep in me during the past year. It felt like I was waking up from a long dark coma and I was beginning to be the person I used to be.

Since we were going in the same direction, the Guttman sisters and I stayed together from then on. We traveled any way we could, sometimes jumping on a freight train which would take us a distance, and when it stopped we continued on foot. Still not knowing the way to Hungary, I constantly worried that I might become separated from my group. It happened one day that we came upon a man who offered us a ride on his horse-drawn wagon. The boys and girls all jumped up, but I was still standing on the ground when it seemed that there was no room left for me. I was terrified that they might leave me behind, and I would not know which way to turn. With a courage and aggressiveness uncharacteristic to my nature, I jumped onto the already moving vehicle and pushed the others aside to make room for myself. When I think back on those days, tears fill my eyes. I see myself - a young girl, so alone - standing somewhere in Europe, not knowing where I am. Alone in a chaotic world turned up-side-down.

Three weeks had passed since our liberation when finally we reached a border city of Hungary. Although I had never been in that part of the country before, I knew that from here on I would not be lost, I would find my way home.

What amazes me today, and even makes me angry, is that at that time I felt no hostility toward the country which treated us so horribly. Instead, I felt I was home again.

As I was crossing the border back into Hungary, I suddenly realized that during the past year I never knew when our holidays were nor did I give it any thought that the food I ate was not kosher. At that moment, I promised myself that I would again be an observant Jew and I would keep the dietary laws. This was not an easy vow to make, and especially to keep, in the post war years. Most of us who survived rebelled against our religion, against G-d, who would permit such devastation to happen to us and to our people. Being observant, I was regarded as peculiar, a show-off among the survivors, and I was often ridiculed for it. But for me, it was a connection to the life I had before. I also felt I must do this for the memory of my parents who were murdered because of their religion.

I was now in Hungarian territory, however, getting back to my hometown was not simple. The country was in complete disorder, the transportation was chaotic. Few trains were operating and those which did had no schedule. No one knew when the trains would be leaving or where their destination would be. The Guttman sisters and I stayed at the train station and waited until we learned that one of the freight trains that was carrying coals in its open wagons would probably be heading to Budapest. The coal was piled up high and we climbed on top of it not thinking that this could be dangerous. Russian soldiers were everywhere and we did not know that as girls we had to be afraid of them. Nothing frightened us now that the Nazis were gone.

We traveled through the night, the train making many stops, jerking and jolting every time it started out again. Trying desperately not to slip off, I dug my hand into the pile of coal, but there was nothing to hold onto except to grab a chunk of it which slid with me every time I slid.

It was already morning, a beautiful June day, when we arrived in Budapest. The sun was shining brightly over the city which, while in the Lager, I believed didn't exist anymore. It seemed then that it never did.

The train pulled into the West side (Nyugati) railway station, one of two main stations of Budapest. It was almost a year (or was it in another lifetime?) that I had fled this city with my mother and sister, trying to save our lives in Slovakia. We left then from the dreaded East side (Keleti) station and now I had come full circle. I came back, but I came back without my mother and my sister. I felt that I had abandoned them in Auschwitz. I had gone there with them, and I left them behind. I felt guilty that I came back.

As the representatives of the Joint welcomed the survivors at the train station, my thoughts wondered back to those dreadful times when the Hungarian gendarmes were swarming the station to catch the desperate Jews who were trying to escape to save their lives.

The Jewish gymnasium (high school) was converted to a shelter for the survivors. It was our receiving center where we provided our identification so people could search for family members. The school building was filled with boys and girls in their late teens and early twenties who had come back. The lucky ones came back with a sister, a brother, or a cousin. But most of them came back all alone. Was there anyone with a mother, a father? It was so rare; I did not meet any.

Budapest was the only city in Hungary where there was some chance for Jewish families, parents and children to survive, either in the Swedish protected houses or in some of the so-called "Jewish Houses." We know today, that in the summer of 1944, the leaders of the Jewish community had negotiated with the corrupt Germans - Eichmann himself - offering huge amounts of money for the safety of the Jews of Budapest. They were hoping that while the negotiations were going on, the deportations would be stalled, and precious time would be gained, during which, the war might come to an end. Still, thousands were killed in Budapest when in October 1944 the Arrow-Cross party, the

most rabid Jew-hating group of Hungarians, came to power. The mob, led by their leader Ferenc Szalasi, drove the people out from many of the "Jewish Houses," - the ones that were marked with the yellow star - lined them up alongside the "Blue Danube" River, and machine-gunned them into the river. Many were thrown alive into the icy waters. And the "Blue Danube" turned red from the Jewish blood.

I was desperate to find any surviving relatives. I did not know where to look for my brother, but I remembered where my uncle Izrael, my father's older brother, and his family had lived. Were they able to survive?

I started out toward their apartment and it did not seem real that I was walking on these familiar streets. The streets where I had been so fearful the year before. I now walked in my striped "Haftling" uniform, and the strange looking shoes on my feet, which I am sure never had been seen outside the Lager. Everyone could tell that I was a Jew, but I was not afraid now.

My uncle, my aunt and their four sons had survived and so I found my first relatives. When I knocked at their door they did not recognize me. But as soon they realized who I was they asked about my mother and sister, remembering that we left for Slovakia together. I told them: "We were taken to Auschwitz and they died there." They did not ask any more questions, and we did not talk about how I survived.

Words fail me to express the happiness I felt when I learned from my aunt and uncle that my brother, Ervin, was alive and that he was back in our hometown, Nyiregyhaza. I have a brother!! I will not be alone! They also told me that my cousin, Ilonka, had survived the war in Romania and that she was in Budapest, staying in the apartment where my grandparents used to live.

I wanted to rush to see Ilonka, but my aunt insisted that we first shop for a new dress, some underwear and a pair of normal shoes. I did not understand her. Why would I need all these new things? I had a dress and a pair of shoes to wear. As soon as I got the new clothes, my aunt threw away my lice - infested "Haftling" uniform. I kept my bag with the soup bowl and the spoon. I did not want to part with them.

With the news that Ervin had survived, and that Ilonka was in Budapest, pieces of my old life were slowly returning.

On my way to meet my cousin, I thought of the summer of the past year, when we were living in this city as Christians, so fearful, so haunted. How sad my mother was when Ilonka left for Romania. How worried she was not knowing whether Ilonka was able to get there safely. How much my mother missed her. I couldn't wait to see Ilonka again.

Happiness was mixed with pain when Ilonka and I met. In the first few minutes warm, wonderful memories from years past rushed into my mind. But soon they disappeared, and sorrow took their place knowing how much we both had lost in a year's time. There were no tears, nor was there joy, just the realization that the life we had before was gone forever. Ilonka asked me about my mother and Evi and my only answer was, "They did not come back". We did not talk about them anymore, nor did we talk about her parents or her little boy, Tommy. We buried those who were killed in the death camps with the simple sentence: "They did not come back."

During the course of the next year I spent a lot of time with Ilonka. She was like a wonderful, caring older sister. She took me to the hairdresser, to the dressmakers, to the movies and theaters. We were together for weeks at a time, but to this day neither of us knows the details of what we went through and how we survived; our survival was stated simply by our physical presence.

On my first night back in Budapest I stayed with Ilonka at our grandparents' bombed out apartment. The bedroom had a direct hit from a cannon shell, which happened while the Russians were battling the city. The front wall was gone, wide open to the outside. Bricks and mortar were scattered all over the room; we stepped over them, and it didn't enter my mind that this might not be an ordinary sight. But for the first time since my capture in Slovakia, I slept in an ordinary bed with a regular mattress, fluffy pillows and covers. Ilonka asked me to stay with her in Budapest and it was wonderful to know that I could be with her. Since she had been married and had a child before, she represented to me the adult figure I longed for so much. However, I was anxious to go to Nyiregyhaza to be with my brother, Ervin.

From Ilonka I learned that her younger brother David and my mother's nineteen year old brother Matyu had also survived the war, and together with Ervin, they were renting an apartment in Nyiregyhaza. How happy I was knowing that a few members of our family were alive. Ilonka gave me their address and I said good-bye to her. I walked back to the school building and found the Guttman sisters still there. That day we set out for the final part of our return to our hometowns. We traveled by train and it did not occur to us to purchase a ticket. The rules of a civilized world were still foreign to us. By evening, the train stopped at Debrecen, a city, fifty kilometers from my destination. When we were told that we would not be going any further until the next morning, we got off the train, and lay down for the night on the platform. I used my bag with the soup bowl in it as a pillow. Sleeping on the cement platform seemed to me a very natural thing to do. Early in the morning, we boarded the train again, and about an hour later, the Guttman sisters and I separated. We had arrived in my hometown, Nyiregyhaza, they had to travel somewhat further, to their hometown, Nagykallo.



Nyíregyháza

Látkép

A postcard from Nyíregyháza, which I sent to Tuli in the beginning of our friendship, when he was visiting friends in Budapest.

Note the Stuhmer Chocolate Store.

EXPRESSZ

Belföldön
léres bélyeg
, ha a kel-
sen és név-
írásokon
vül csak
UDVÖZLŐ
-ót írunk

Grainfield 2024

1854 Oct 18

Parasites
Budapest
MAGYAROK
SZAGOT 40

30. sz. — Minden, jog fenntartva

CHAPTER NINE

I felt triumphant as I stepped off the train onto the ground of my hometown. I came back! It seemed that I was returning from my escape to Budapest. For the moment, everything that happened after that - Auschwitz and the year of horror - disappeared from my mind.

It was early morning, the town was still sleeping, only the robins were up, chirping. The rays of a waking sun were promising a beautiful day. Contrary to the time when I so fearfully left the city on the side roads, I now took the main street, lined with the blossoming trees of spring, in the direction of our house. My mind was filled with illusions. I pictured my mother and father waiting for me in the doorway, just as I had left them over a year ago. I felt as if time had been at a standstill, frozen for the past year. My feet were almost dancing as I walked on the street where I used to come and go every day to my tutor while studying for my graduation exams. I was swinging my bag back and forth - in it my soup bowl and spoon - just as I used to do with my briefcase. I was rushing to reach the top of our street and shout in the air so loud that my parents would hear me while I was still far away from them: "I am coming home! We survived those evil times!" And then, I arrived at the crossing where I had to change directions to get to the apartment where Ervin, David and Matyu now lived. Turning

the corner, the illusion of my going home was suddenly replaced with the realization that the short distance down the street to the apartment was the road leading me to my new life, different from the one I had known. A life without parents, a life where our past would be a faraway memory. The nightmare of Auschwitz would be put in the darkest corner of my mind, but it would never fade with time.

The address Ilonka had given me in Budapest was a modern three story building. I rang the bell at the first floor apartment, where a middle-aged woman, the housekeeper, opened the door. "I am Ervin's sister." I told her. She took this very matter-of-factly and she let me in. I entered into a comfortable apartment, nicely furnished with a combination of a few pieces of furniture each of the three boys had found in the former home of their families. Ervin, David and Matyu were out of town; they were deeply involved, with great success, in the flourishing black market which was considered to be the normal, almost legitimate, business of that time. Later, when they came home, they also acknowledged my coming back with a matter-of-fact attitude, that typified the Survivors' lack of emotion attitude of those days. I was asked about my mother and Evi and again I answered with the few simple words; "They did not come back." I said those words without letting their meaning form a picture in my mind. The words came out of my mouth but my mind was numb, empty of thoughts.

Today however, pictures do form in my mind. I see my mother and my sister, and I feel their panic and their embarrassment as they were ordered to undress and stand naked among strangers. Were they aware that they were entering a gas chamber? Or, had they been fooled into believing that they were going into a shower room? How were the last minutes of their lives? We know today, as is described in the book, "THE WORLD MUST KNOW," by Michael Berenbaum, that there was human waste, vomit and blood in the gas chambers; that the victims suffered unspeakably before they



Ervin in Nyíregyháza, 1945



David and Matyn in Myriag háza, 1945

died. And we also know today from the testimonies of the few survivors of the Sondercommendo (the men who worked in the crematoriums, whom the Nazis killed regularly time to time so that all the witnesses would be eliminated) that when the bodies were moved to the ovens some were still breathing, and were burned alive. Did my parents and my sister mercifully fall unconscious in the first seconds as the gas was pumped into the room? Or were they trampled , struggling for a breath of air, suffocating under piles of dead bodies falling over them ? I agonize over this today. Those are the horrific pictures we now know about, pictures the world should know about and should never forget!

The summer of 1945 was a time when I gradually re-entered civilization. A month had passed since my liberation, since I last drank the black coffee with brome in it, and a few days after my return home, I got my menstrual period. My body started to function normally, but it took longer for my mind to adjust to normal life again. I could not comprehend Ervin's insistence on buying some new dresses, coats and shoes for me. Why would I need all this? I only need one pair of shoes, one dress - just not to be naked. Food was what I felt I never had enough of. I would go into the pantry and finish a whole meal, that our housekeeper had prepared for all of us, by myself.

Some time passed before I ventured out of the apartment. Eventually, I started to go out in the mild summer mornings. The sun peek through the leaves as I walked under the old shady trees. I passed by the houses where people whom I had known had lived before. Now they were gone; whole families had disappeared. I passed the house where my Aunt Elza, my mother's younger sister had lived. She, her husband, Miklos Kreisler, an architect, and their beautiful blonde two year old daughter, Zsuzsika were gone; Auschwitz had swallowed them up.



Ervin and J. 1946 Nyíregyháza



My aunt Elza as a young girl. 1930 Voloc.

(430 extra - small)
pencil the paper

Those walks were painful and confusing. The streets and houses were familiar, but still strange to me. The city looked the same. No bombs had been dropped on this place, not one house was destroyed. The war did not leave its mark here, except on the Jewish community. Our parents were gone. Our people were gone; ninety-five (or more) percent of them forced to march into the gas chambers upon arrival in Auschwitz, never given a chance to survive. It seemed as if a vicious storm had swept away our people and turned the city into an orphanage for those who came back.

But now, I walked the streets without any fear that I was Jewish. There was no chasing, no name calling, nor any display of antisemitism. I never felt so free of fear on those streets, not even before the Nazi occupation. I wondered: To where have all those anti-Semites vanished? After centuries of hatred, to where did they suddenly disappear? With the Russians occupying Hungary, they did not dare to show their hatred. Only the expression on their faces would reveal their surprise and disappointment that some Jews had come back. The Hungarian population was as much afraid of the Russians, (whom they erroneously thought to be friends of the Jews) as we Jews had been of the Nazis .

The weeks passed, and I had less and less hope for the return of my father and younger brother. Still, I fantasized that one day the door would open and they would come through the doorway. I often went to the "Joint" (the Jewish organization) to see if by some miracle I could find their names on the survivors' list or maybe a message that someone knew them in the Lager and would know of their fate.

Much later, Ervin and I did learn about the fate of our father and younger brother. Our father, upon arrival at Auschwitz in May 1944, was taken for work. In September, an infection developed on

his foot, and because of that he was selected and was killed in the gas chamber. Although our mother and Evi were deported to Auschwitz four months after our father was, they were killed two days apart. We light the Yahrzeit (memorial) candles for our mother and sister a day before the Sukkoth (Feast of Tabernacles) holiday. For our father, we light the candle two days later, on the second night of Sukkoth.

Our young brother Otto, (Ocsi) was taken to Auschwitz in August or possibly in September 1944. We learned about his fate from one of the very few who survived from his group. He was working in Auschwitz until the following December. At that time, with the Russian army nearing Auschwitz, the Germans liquidated the camp, marching the prisoners - now known as the Death March - further into Germany. The prisoners, weak and skeletal from starvation, marched for days, dragging themselves in the sub-zero winter blizzards without food and only rags on their bodies. Those, who could go no further and fell, among them our brother, were shot by the guards and left dying on the road. Did our young brother, still a child, die instantly from a bullet or was he left to suffer, slowly freezing to death? I will never know! Because we do not know the exact date of his death, we light the Yahrzeit candle for him on Yom-Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar.

One day, on my way to the Joint, I met Mr. Julius (Gyula) Wiszer, the principal of the Gymnasium, the school that I had attended. He recognized me and stopped to tell me that I did very well on the written part of my matriculation exam. He said I should complete the oral part so that I could receive my diploma. I looked at him as though he had spoken to me in a foreign language. Didn't the world know what happened to us? Didn't this man know where I was this past year? I wanted to tell him that I came back from a place, Auschwitz, and the Lager, where the tormenting hunger and cold and the

A tanulmányi értesítő

14.

lapjáról:

505

anyakönyvi szám

Bizo-nyítvány.

Kupferstein Agnes

nyitványos
magán

tanuló

nyolcadik

osztályában

a

Az eredeti
1.-^o
filléres
bélyeggel
ellátva

az 1943/44. iskolai évben a

következő előmenetelt tanúsította:

Magaviselet	/
Rendszeret	/
Hit- és erkölcstan	jéles
Magyar nyelv és irodalom	jéles
Történelem államtani ismeretekkel	jéles
Gazdasági és társadalmi ismeretek	* /
Föld- és néprajz	/
Latin nyelv	jéles
Görög nyelv	/
Német nyelv	jéles
Francia, olasz, angol nyelv	jéles
Bölcsészet	jéles
Természetrajz	/
Vegytan	/
Természettan	jéles
Mennyiségtan és mértan	jéles
Rajz műalkotások ismertetésével	jéles
Testnevelés	jéles
Egészségtan	jéles
Szépírás	/
Gyorsírás	/
Ének	/
Kézimunka	/
Az egész évben mulasztott órák száma	/ igazolt, / igazolatlan.

Általános tanulmányi eredménye:	Kitűnő
A tandíjkedvezményének foka, száma, kelte:	/
A tanári testület általános ítélete:	Excellenciát viselőre jelentkeztetett.
Kelt	Ugyorogháza, 1944. évi április hó 1-én.
(P. H.)	Ugyorogháza sk. Nagy Istvánné Reguly sk.
igazgató.	osztályfő. Glória sk.
Jegyzet:	/
Felvettem a	osztályba.
Kelt 1944. év	hó n.
(P. H.)	igazgató.

This is a copy of my report card from my last year in the Gymnasium. It indicates that I received A's (jeles) in all of my subjects, and that I did excellent (kitűnő) over all. It also states that I am eligible to take the matriculation exam.

I received this copy upon request after the war, in 1948.

ILLETÉK



szám.

Ez a másolat készült a m. kir. vallás- és
közoktatásügyi minisztériumnak 1895. évi 3038. sz.
rendelete szerint.

Ujvárosi, 1948. évi febr. hó 13. n.

(P. H.)

Bukó György
igazgató.

MÁSOLAT

(Iskolai célokra.)

Kupferstein Ágnes

VIII. o.

tanuló

Tanulmányi Értesítőjéből.

Törzslapja.

A tanuló	születésének helye	Debrecen
	születésének éve, hónapja, napja	1926. május 26.
	vallása	ikt.
	anyanyelve	magy.
	állampolgársága	/
	újraltatásának ideje	/
	utoljára a	Geduly Henrik Leánygimn. iskola
	VIII. osztályába járt.	
	apjának vagy gyámjának	neve
		foglalkozása
	lakóhelye	

Ezt a törzslapot kiállította a nyitólapsági ev.
Geduly H. Leánygimn. igazgatósága.
Ujvárosi, 1948. évi febr. hó 14. n.

(P. H.)

Bukó György
igazgató.

devastating fear of torture erased everything from my mind that I had studied so hard. I wanted to tell him that having been in Auschwitz, where there was no trace of civilization, a diploma didn't mean anything to me anymore. I wanted to tell him all this, but he would never understand - only those who were there could understand - so I didn't utter a word. It would be a long time before I would want to pick up a book to read.

Slowly, I was getting used to my new life. Subconsciously trying to avoid everything that reminded me of my life before, it was not until the fall of 1945 that I first went back with Ervin to our house at 24 Bocskai Street (Bocskai utca 24). Except for a couple pieces of furniture that Ervin found on his return, the house had been emptied of all our belongings by the Hungarians. Russian soldiers now had their offices there. As they let us in, I found the place that had once been my home completely strange to me, as if I had never lived there before. My mind refused to remember. In the two and half years that I stayed in Hungary, I never went toward the direction of Bocskai Street again.

Throughout the summer, boys and girls of our town who had survived Auschwitz and the slave labor camps came back one by one. They were few in number, and most of them were the sole survivors of their entire families. Other survivors came to make their home in Nyiregyhaza, from smaller neighboring towns, and also from towns of the Sub-Carpathian region of Hungary, because that part of the country was annexed by Russia at the end of the war. By the fall, there was a lively young Jewish community in our city. A closeness, a camaraderie, developed among us, as if we were a big extended family. We were bond by our losses, by our past suffering, and by our desire to create a new life for ourselves.



Our house on Bocskay St. Nyiregyháza.
This picture was taken after the war.

This was an unprecedented time, an all-too-brief period, when all the Jews who had survived the Nazi terror were equal. A time absent of any social or class distinction. These differences disappeared when rich and poor, educated and illiterate, observant, and non-religious were thrown together into the ghettos and cattle cars.

The young returnees often gathered in our apartment, where there was a homey atmosphere, food was plentiful, and where they were always welcome. We ate together and we listened to American music on our newly purchased record player. I loved the forties' hit songs, they conveyed to me a celebration of freedom, life, and romance.

We spent our times together, strolling through the city in the beautiful autumn evenings. There were cheerful conversations, smiles and laughter. We did not talk about our life before, or the deportations, nor about the horrors that had followed. We enjoyed the present and made plans for our future with newly found boundless enthusiasm for life. We talked about America, our dreamland, home of our pure and heroic liberators, where anti-Semitism did not exist (we thought). We hoped that in the not too distant future we would be able to go there. As young as we were, and without any guidance, we realized early on that we can not stay in the country which had harmed us so much, which had robbed us of our families. From the very beginning we knew that we should not dwell on the past, rather we must devote ourselves to the future. We must have realized that it was our mission to create new families, to ensure Jewish continuity. We yearned for love and for family, and soon romances started, and marriages took place. We were on our way to rebuilding our lives.

In September, I began to write a diary. It was my way of talking to my sister Evi and telling her about the everyday happenings in my life, just as we used to in years past. I still have the diary, a small notebook, some of its pages yellowed with age.

I wrote in my diary almost every day during my stay in Hungary, always addressing it to my sister as if she would be away from home only temporarily. I wrote about boys whom I met, and what I thought of them and how I felt about them. I told Evi what we talked about and how thrilled I was when they showed interest in me, when I knew that they liked me. I wrote about many boys, each of whom I day-dreamed about for a while, and each of whom at the moment I thought that I deeply loved. And most of the time those boys did not even know about it. These were innocent romances, because although we were young and were a generation without parents, the moral values with which we were brought up remained with us.

Today, when I read the pages of my diary it is clear to me that I was searching for the one I could belong to forever. Through my diary I ran to Evi when I was happy, sad, or hurt.

On April 17, 1946 I wrote in my diary: "This evening I went for a walk with Tuli. We had a long and interesting conversation and I feel that this will turn out to be more than a friendship."

Tuli (Joseph) Grunfeld, survivor of the Mauthausen death camp, lived around the corner from us with his four sisters, who survived Auschwitz (their two brothers did not come back), and with his three cousins - teenage girls - whose parents perished in Auschwitz. (In those days cousins became like brothers and sisters). After that first stroll in the evening, Tuli and I saw each other every day. But not having much self-confidence that he would be interested in me I did not want him to know how much I already liked him. One day he asked me if I would allow him to write a few words in my diary, and translated from Hungarian, word for word, this is what he wrote:

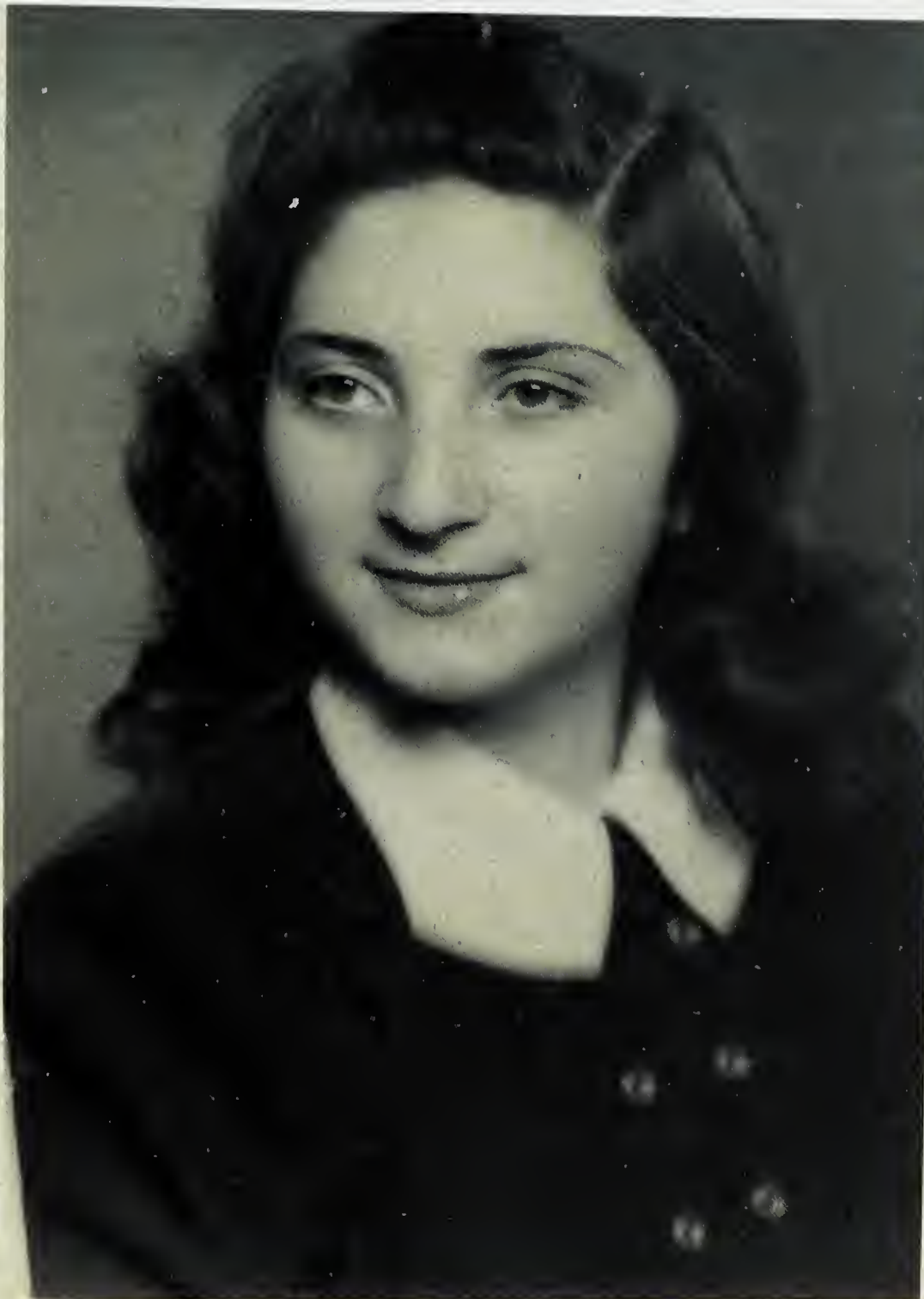
"1946 V, 28. Thursday afternoon. ("V" stands for the month of May) I am here at Agi's, and after a long time I feel that she does not doubt anymore that I really love her. I am beginning to believe that I am not completely uninteresting to her. But she dare not admit it, because she feels if she would



Tuli and his sisters Nyiregyháza, 1947



Tuli Nyiregyháza 1947



Tuli's cousin, Susan Weinstock.

Below: Tuli's cousins, Peszi and Hagi Davidowicz Nyiregyháza 1947.



make it known, it would be unpleasant for her the possible disappointment that she so often mentions. I would like to convince her that it is not possible that such sincere love that I feel toward her could change. I also would like to persuade her that no one could ever love her more. I feel that I could not love her more passionately, because everything has a limit, and my love for her is the ultimate limit of the human feelings."

Ours became the romance of our town, and it changed everything around me. I came to be the envy of the girls in our city. There were many pretty girls who would have been happy to date Tuli, but he fell in love with me. His sisters were asking: "Why Agi?" (short for Agnes). I myself was wondering: Why me? He was tall, dark, handsome, and while the other boys were in the illegal black market business, he was a partner in a legitimate oil and gasoline business. But what I really liked about him was that I found him to be more serious than the others, and that he was observant. In my eyes he was "older", - and I liked that - although he was only twenty-four years old. I wrote in my diary; "Finally I met someone, who is mature, after all those childish boys." Ours was the purest, innocent love and it made me feel secure and important. It made me forget the past, and for awhile, not think about the future.

Tuli became the center of my life. But this idyllic time did not last long. Soon I realized that eventually we will have to part, probably forever. The thought of goodbye loomed constantly in the back of my mind. It overshadowed the joy of the present and turned our courtship bittersweet.

Toward the end of 1946, Ervin and I, like most of the survivors, started to make plans for our immigration to faraway, unknown places. Tuli was among the very few who did not want to leave Hungary. At least not yet. He did not want to leave his four sisters and he did not want to leave his prosperous business for an uncertain future.

Meanwhile Communism was getting stronger and stronger in Hungary and to obtain a passport and visa was becoming increasingly more difficult. Ervin and I, determined to leave, decided to cross over to Slovakia illegally and go on to Prague, the Czech capital, where as we heard, there were more opportunities to get a visa to other countries.

I shudder today as I think back to our daringness. As we attempted to cross over the Slovak border, wading through the waist high water of a small river near the city of Ujhely, we were caught by the border guards. If not for some local Jews with connections at the police department who took us out of jail, we could have found ourselves deported to Siberia to die there, after surviving the Nazis.

How our life had changed! How the Nazis had changed us! We had grown up so overly protected by our parents, and now we had the courage to do such daring things.

Being caught by the border guards did not deter us. After our release from jail we continued on to Prague. With the help of a Jewish guide we traveled by car from Ujhely to the Slovak city of Kassa, where we boarded a train, without having any permit papers to travel from Slovakia to the Czech Republic. We knew that the passengers' papers would be checked while we were in Slovak territory and that we would not be safe until we reach the Czech border. We purchased our tickets for the sleeping compartment hoping that the passengers there would not be woken up to have their papers checked. Of course, this was very naive thinking.

Around midnight, I heard doors sliding open near our compartment. A few minutes later, I heard the voices of soldiers in the cabin nearest to ours. They would have entered our compartment next, if the train had not stopped. We had reached the Czech border. I saw through the window the Slovak

soldiers leaving the train and the Czech officials boarding it. A whistle sounded, the train started out, and I thanked G-d for saving us.

We spent a few weeks in Prague, but unable to get a visa to any country in the world, we returned - crossing the border illegally - back to Hungary, back to Nyiregyhaza. I was so happy to see Tuli again! But Ervin and I did not give up our plan to leave Hungary.

The possibility that we would be able to go to America became very real when we received the affidavits that our uncle Israel sent us from America. He had immigrated with his family after the war and was now living in New York City.

Tuli and I continued to see each other. I loved him too much to end our courtship although I no longer saw a future together. But Tuli must have thought otherwise, because he would say to me: "How wonderful it will be, when we will be together forever, when I won't have to go home for the night, but we can stay together." And I wrote in my diary: "How does he want to accomplish this, when he knows that I will be leaving soon and yet he does not make a move to come with me?" But I was too proud to ask him this question. Our courtship became for me more bitter than sweet. The "tomorrow", our parting, was always present in my mind. It hurt that he did not ask me to stay either. Did he think that once I left he would easily forget me? Or was it because he did not want me to miss my chance to go to America? Today I wonder: What if he would have asked me to stay? Would I have listened to my heart and stayed? Part from my brother? Or would I have been strong enough to follow my common sense not to?

Knowing that our goodbye was coming closer with every passing day, we spent as much time together as Tuli's business allowed. For hours we would stroll in the city and he constantly talked

about our future so optimistically. I listened to him and wanted to believe his words, but my heart was aching.

One Sunday afternoon while we were on a leisurely walk and deep in conversation I suddenly froze when I saw a woman with a teenage girl coming toward us. I thought: Am I hallucinating? The girl looks like me and the woman looks like my mother. The woman was wearing a black coat with Persian fur on the collar and pockets, and the girl was wearing a brown tweed coat with Nutria fur on the collar. As they passed by us, I cried out loud. "Those are our winter coats! My mother's and mine!" Tuli and I turned. I wanted to tear those coats off of them. But the two were already running, and darted across the street into a nearby church. We ran after them up the steps of the church, but at the entrance we stopped. We could not bring ourselves to burst into a church; it was not the place to make a commotion. Or, were we afraid that the Gentiles inside would turn against us? We waited at the entrance for hours, thinking that when the service will be over they would have to emerge. But the church must have had a back door, because they never came out. I did not have a chance to confront those people, to get to know who those grave plunderers were. I wanted to get back our coats, not because I needed them - I had a new one - but because I did not want that woman to wear my mother's coat.

Fearing that the Communists would soon close the borders, the young survivors were anxious to leave Hungary. They would go to all corners of the world: Countries in Western Europe, Palestine, South America, Australia, America, Canada, wherever they would be let in.

My cousin Ilonka had remarried and was living in London, England. Soon her brother David followed her. Ervin met a girl, Hedy Klein, - now his wife - in Prague and spent many weeks there,



Ervin visiting Hady Klein in Prague. 1947.
In the back is Hady's cousin.

crossing the border illegally back and forth. Each time he left, I was dreadfully worried that I might never see him again. Matyu and I stayed in Nyiregyhaza and our housekeeper stayed with us, although we no longer had money to pay her. In fact there was little money for food or for heating fuel either. But those things did not concern me: only the approaching goodbye to Tuli made me very sad.

As Ervin and I were proceeding with our immigration to America which was going slowly but with definite progress, I moved to Budapest, to be available as soon as we would be called to the American Embassy. Tuli and I corresponded and he came a few times to visit. Toward the end of 1947, Ervin and I received our Hungarian passports, and then the notice for an interview at the American Embassy arrived.

It was an unforgettable moment, a dream come true, when the precious, difficult to obtain American visas (student visas) were stamped into our passports. I was extremely happy and heartbroken at the same time. It looked like I would be separated forever, from Tuli, the one who meant so much to me. Would I always have to part from those who are important in my life?

Tuli came to Budapest to say goodbye and we spent a few days together. We went to movies, theaters, and to elegant coffee houses to listen to nice music. But I was miserable knowing that we soon will part.

The few days passed quickly. I do not remember the reason why Tuli left Budapest a day earlier than Ervin and I did. I accompanied him to the train station, and he still talked about the future, when we will be together forever. I felt I was choking as I swallowed my tears; I did not want him to see them. He boarded the train and as he came to the window I waved to him with a forced smile on my face. Only when the train had left did I allow the tears to spill freely across my cheeks. I was sure I will



Tuli and I just before I left for America.

never see Tuli again. Hungary was on the verge of falling behind the Iron Curtain, its borders being sealed and immigration prohibited.

On the 31st of December 1947, Ervin and I left Budapest. We traveled to Prague, this time legally, with all the necessary papers. There, we waited two months until ship tickets to America were available. During that time, the Joint took care of us, and along with many survivors we were housed in a hotel and were provided with ration tickets. Ervin was always hungry and I often gave him half my portion, because longing for Tuli, I did not have much appetite.

With a group of young survivors (organized by the Joint) we left Prague by train on February 29, 1948. Traveling through Belgium, and by boat through the English Channel, la Manche, we arrived at Dover, England from where we traveled by train to London. It was a tremendously warm feeling to see Ilonka again when we visited her in London and met her husband Marko Steinlauf and their newborn son, Peter. A new baby, the restart of our shattered life.

A few days later, in Southampton, we boarded the ship, the SS Washington, which was going to take me further and further away from Tuli, to our final destination, to America.

Our first day on the ship was pleasant. We were overwhelmed by the many courses served at breakfast, lunch and dinner, and by the variety of foods we could select from. In the evening there was entertainment, music and dancing. I was looking forward to an enjoyable journey. What I did not know was that the ship was still anchored in the harbor because of bad weather. The next day, as soon as the ship started moving, I became terribly seasick and this lasted until we arrived in New York on March 14, 1948. Our Uncle Izrael was waiting for us at the harbor and handed me more than a dozen letters from Tuli. Already in the very first letter he asked me to try to get him an affidavit, so that he could start working on his immigration.



A picture Honka sent us from Prague,
telling us that she got engaged to Morho Steinlauf
from London, England.
1946

Daphne, Erenkian, the children
how do you like the young man whom
I am happily willing to follow even
to London?

With much love,
Danka and Marko.

Praha, 1946. VI. 18.

Translated to English:

My dear Agi, Eren, Matyu
how do you like the young man whom
I am happily willing to follow even
to London?

With lots of love
Danka and Marko.

Praha, 1946. VI. 18.



A postcard I sent to Tuli from the ship the
S.S. Washington, on my way to America.

Printed in U. S. A.

POST CARD

United States Lines
WASHINGTON

Length 705 Feet

Breadth 86 Feet

Gross Tonnage 24,289

The S. S. WASHINGTON, the S. S. MANHATTAN
and the New S. S. AMERICA are the largest, fast-
est and finest liners ever built in the United States.



ADDRESS

Hop.

Deutsch, Pannonei és női
Tuli részre.

Hungarian

Nyírcsúcsra.
szőlő u. 22.

Drága Tuli kárm: írt
A ripen bítató hajóval
utazunk, illetve, még min-
dip o, szörzöben állunk.
Holnap mindenről rész-
letesen írok. Leg remélve es-
ik mindenről. Az, mint
csórolt nélkül Ák: (vagyis)

AMERICAN COLORTYPE New York - CHICAGO

CHAPTER TEN

I loved America the minute I stepped down on its shores. Although Ervin and I spent the first few days in the detention center on Ellis Island, it did not seem bad as long it was in America.

I loved America, though it was not at all like I had imagined. I had imagined that in America everything was new and shiny. I pictured that Ervin and I would rent a small apartment in a modern skyscraper, with huge windows letting in the sunshine. Instead, upon leaving Ellis Island, we moved in with my uncle, aunt and their four sons in a two bedroom apartment in a two-story walk-up building in an old, dilapidated neighborhood of Williamsburg. This is not to complain about my uncle and aunt. On the contrary, Ervin and I should always be thankful to them, as they were most wonderful to us. They were willing to share their small place with us, help in every way, and they tried to substitute for our parents. But, we did not want to depend on them for very long.

Six weeks later we rented a furnished room in a basement apartment on Lee Avenue which was considered to be the heart of this very religious, Orthodox Williamsburg. Saturday afternoons people strolled up and down the Avenue, but when I looked out the window that was even with the sidewalk, I only saw the foot-traffic of the people passing by. I heard the promenaders' conversation, which might as well have been Chinese, since I did not understand the English language. Although I did not



My aunt Apora (Apus) and uncle Israel (Bizi) on a vacation.

know much about cooking, we purchased a two-burner portable electric hot plate, and started our new household. Ervin had to endure as I made an effort to improve my poor cooking skill.

By June, we had a new address: 196 Hooper Street. There we rented one and half furnished rooms from the Friedman family, now on the first floor. Moving was easy. We carried our couple of suitcases and our portable electric "stove". I wrote an enthusiastic letter to Tuli about our first little home, describing every piece of furniture: The two beds, the night stand between the beds and our new small radio that sat on top of it, and the two armoires. I designated the half room as our kitchen, and wrote that I already purchased some pots and pans, and a few pieces of china and silverware (of course, not genuine china or silver). I wrote excitedly about our brand-new, huge General Electric \$286 refrigerator, for which Ervin gave a \$60 down payment. The rest of the cost was to be paid monthly, an arrangement very new to us. I sent Tuli a picture that came with the refrigerator showing all the food it could hold. To me, it demonstrated the richness of America.

We were eager to start working, but jobs were hard to find because of the many refugees. It was especially hard for those of us who had no skill in any trade. Still, our hopes for the future and our ambition to succeed were strong. My knowledge of sewing was only somewhat more than threading the sewing machine, yet I took a job in a clothing factory. A few days later I was fired, but that was time enough for me to learn, and at my second job, I presented myself as an "experienced" assembly-line seamstress. Among the many new experiences, I found it strange that everyone was so secretive about where they worked or how much their salary was. It seemed they feared that if they disclose it, others would take away their jobs. Expressions like "making a living" were completely alien to us. We had to figure out on our own that it meant earning enough money for one to live on. We had a lot to learn about the American way of life, but nobody was willing to teach us. Still, we were in a free

country, where we did not have to fear persecution, and where it seemed we could accomplish a lot in the future, and we were thankful for it.

A few months after our arrival in New York, Ervin moved to Cleveland, where job possibilities were somewhat better. That was another separation for me. To share the rent, I needed a roommate. I was fortunate to find Edith Rappaport, who was also a survivor of Auschwitz, and who had just arrived in America. Edith came to meet me, and within a few minutes she announced with a sweet smile: "My dear Mamele, I am coming." That was typical of Edith's personality. She was a warm, lively, outgoing and intelligent girl, and we soon became close friends. We looked for jobs together and found one in a coat factory. The boss kindly hired us, as we were cheap labor, but the union workers did not like it. Still having the mind-set of being frightened by authority, when someone whom we thought to be an official person (he was probably a salesmen) came into the shop, Edith and I ran to hide among the already finished coats hanging on a rack. We slipped our arms into the sleeves, scrunched our necks and pulled the coats over our heads. We did not think of our legs showing. The other workers stared at us amazed, wondering what sort of game we were playing. In later years, whenever we reminisced, we had a good laugh about it.

For entertainment Edith and I would go to the movies which also helped me learn the English language. Some days we would go to explore Manhattan. At the Macy's Department Store we were overwhelmed by the quantity of the merchandise, at Bonwit Teller, and at Saks Fifth Avenue by the prices. At Horn & Hardart, we were fascinated with the working of the automat. Since both Edith and I kept the dietary laws, we did not eat there, but sat at a table and marveled at how appetizingly the pastries and sandwiches were arranged in the rows of small glass cubicles. We found it amazing how when people inserted some coins, a little glass door would pop open, and we watched spellbound as

they took out the sandwich or pastry immediately another would appear in the cubicle. To us this seemed to be magic, that anything is possible in America. Edith spoke English fairly well, and I felt confident riding the labyrinth of subways with her. Edith, with her always cheerful personality, eased the anguished times while I was longing for Tuli, not knowing whether he would ever be able to come to America.

Tuli and I wrote to each other, our letters criss-crossing the Atlantic Ocean daily. The mail's arrival became the most important and most anxious time of my day. Mail was delivered twice daily, and I would rush home on my lunch hour and after work, to wait for the mailman. My heart would throb, until I would catch sight of the blue and red airmail letter. There were happy days, when two or three letters would arrive, only to be followed by a let down, when for a couple of days none would come. The mailman knew me already, and on days like that, he would tell me in a sympathetic tone of voice, "I have nothing for you today."

The hundreds of letters (which we both saved, and still have) were full of love and dreams for the future. I wrote to Tuli excitedly about all the things that were so new to me. "As I was walking on the street"- I wrote - "I saw that people were crowded in front of a store window. I stopped to see what it was they were looking at, and there it was a television playing in the window." It was the first time that I saw a television. I also wrote about the "wonder machine", the washing machine, and the way it cleans the laundry. "And all the while the machine does the work, one can go for a leisurely walk."

But I did not want Tuli to believe that everything was rosy for us newcomers. I wanted to paint an honest, realistic picture of the life of an immigrant in America. I wrote to him about the difficulties of not knowing the language and not having a special trade. Although the Communist take-over in



Tuli's letters to me. ↑



My letters to Tuli ↑

Hungary was imminent, and many private businesses were already taken away by the government, Tuli still had a comfortable life in Hungary. He still had his business and he had his sisters, who as soon as I left introduced him to girls, so that he would not be "lonely". I felt a tremendous responsibility that he would be leaving everything because of me. "I am dreading the thought that you will be disappointed and blame me that you left a comfortable life because of me." I wrote him. "It would be different if you would have always had the ambition to immigrate. How can I ask you to take up a difficult life when your life is so much easier there? "

This honesty caused much misunderstanding. I was expecting a letter in which he would tell me that I meant more to him than anything else in the world. Instead, he interpreted my letter as an excuse, a way of letting him know that I did not want him to come anymore. His answer was, that he was hurt, and he would try to meet someone to help him forget me. Our long-distance love had lots of heartaches and it hung on a hair's-breadth to survive.

Tuli was a world apart from me, and it seemed that the political forces will keep us apart forever. I longed to hear his voice for reassurance, but to receive a telephone call from America in Communist Hungary could have caused him trouble. His letters took many days to arrive and I often thought: Did he meet someone else since he wrote in his last letter that he misses me, and how much he loves me? "I do not want you to write excuses when one day you start courting someone else. I forbid you to apologize." I wrote to him. "Simply stop answering my letters! Don't be considerate about how I feel, and don't be considerate about etiquette!" But then I dreaded the thought that I would continue to write to him how much I love him and miss him, thinking that his letters were only slow to arrive.

It was so long since I had last seen Tuli, heard his voice. I often felt that an impassable ocean separated us, or that there was a wall between us that reached to the sky and that we could never

climb over. I had sent him the necessary papers for his immigration, an affidavit from a Jewish congregation where he would be hired as a Rabbi, but to obtain a Hungarian passport and an American visa was extremely difficult. And to receive an exit visa from Communist Hungary did not seem possible.

Weeks, and months went by with no progress. There were only desperate hopes, frequent despair, and lots of prayers.

In October 1948, ten long months after we had parted, came the first happy day when Tuli received his Hungarian passport. We were elated, and hoped that soon he would be called to the American Consulate, and that we would celebrate Hanukkah together. Because that the communist would close the borders any day now, time was of the essence, but November passed, then December, and so did January. By the end of February I had lost all hope. And then, on the 28 th. of February, 1949, the doorbell rang, and a Western Union man delivered the telegram we were praying for. "Surgery was successful" read the telegram from Tuli. Those were code words we had agreed upon, meaning that the American visa which was so difficult to get, (the American government did not welcome us with open arms) was issued to him. That day I wrote to Tuli: "Could it be possible that for others, this day is just like any other simple, uneventful day, when for me it has brought so much happiness?" But our worries were not over. Tuli still did not have an exit visa. Hungary was by now completely taken over by the communist, and we could only hope for a miracle. A miracle did happen, and with connections, in March, 1949, Tuli was granted his exit visa. He was among the very last ones to leave Hungary legally.

Fifteen months after we last saw or talked to each other, on April 8, I waited with nervous anticipation for Tuli's ship to arrive in the New York Harbor. Thoughts raced through my mind.



Tuli, 1948, when he was coming to America as
a rabbi

1881
522

Q. 1. 1881

Q. 1. 1881

1881

1881

1881

CLASS OF SERVICE

This is a full-rate Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol preceding the address.

WESTERN UNION

CABLEGRAM

JOSEPH L. EGAN
PRESIDENT

SYMBOLS

LC	Deferred Cablegram
NLT	Cable Night Letter
	Ship Radiogram

Received at

NA083 INTL=N BUDAPEST VIA MACKAY 11 28 1740 52 28 PM 4 23
 :LC AGNES KUPFFERSTEIN FRIEDMANNAL=
 :196 HOOPER ST BROOKLYN (NY):

=MUETET SIKERUELT=
 TULID=

196=

THE QUICKEST, SUREST AND SAFEST WAY TO SEND MONEY IS BY TELEGRAPH OR CABLE

The telegram from Tuli in Feb. 28. 1949, notifying me that he received his American Visa.

Would we recognize each other? Did he change? Did I change? Were we going to have the same feelings for each other as when we parted? Later he told me that he also had the same thoughts, the same doubts. But all these doubtful thoughts disappeared when we saw each other.

On April 28, 1949, almost three years to the day after that first stroll in Nyiregyhaza, Tuli and I were married in my aunt and uncle's new and bigger apartment. I wore a borrowed wedding dress. My aunt, together with her volunteer helpers prepared a delicious dinner, and Ervin arranged for flowers and for the photographer. And so, our life in our new country began. A country where we had no roots, no identity. For many years, the survivors were referred to as "Greenhorns," a very derogatory remark, or as "Greeners," not a flattering term either. Still, we were grateful, even though we were looked upon as uneducated people who had come from some barbaric place, since we ill-pronounced, and poorly used the grammar of our new language. The mainstream of American Jews did not want to socialize with us, but we soon made many friends, all immigrants. I was the happiest when I became a mother. Our son, Ranold Ivan (Chaim Isaac) named after his two grandfathers, was born on November 22, 1951. Our daughter, Audrey Ann (Chana Sora) named after her two grandmothers, was born on July 18, 1956.

Our children's generation missed out knowing the special love of a grandparent. As a compensation, Audrey would call our neighbor's grandmother "Grandma", and Rony would often remind his children to appreciate having grandparents, something which he never had.

Over the years, with diligence and hard work, most of the survivors achieved a comfortable life. We became useful citizens in our new country, and strived for excellence in the education of our children. I can proudly say that our son, Ronald, has a law degree and is a Certified Public Accountant. Our daughter, Audrey, is a real-estate attorney.



*Mr. Irving Kupferstein
Mr. and Mrs. Lastow Gabor
request the honor of your presence
at the marriage of his sister and their cousin*

Agnes

to

Joseph Grunfeld

*Thursday evening, April twenty-eighth
nineteen hundred and forty-nine
at nine-thirty o'clock*

*at 286 Hooper Street
Brooklyn, N. Y.*

Bride's Residence:

*196 Hooper Street
Brooklyn, N. Y.*

בעזה"ת

עוד ישמע בערי יהודה ובחוצות ירושלים

קול ששון מ ז ל ט ו ב קול חתן
וקול שמחה וקול כלה

הננו מתכבדים בזה להזמין את קרובינו אוהבינו ומיודעינו
לבא לקחת חבל בשמחתנו יום כלולת

הבחור החתן המושלם

כמר נפתלי יוסף נ"י

בן המנוח מו"ה ר' חיים ישראל גרינפעלד ז"ל הי"ד

עב"ג

הכלה הבתולה המהוללה

מרת פעמיל תחי'

בת המנוח מו"ה ר' יצחק אייזיק קופפערשטיין ז"ל הי"ד

אשר תהי' אי"ה בשעה טובה ומוצלחת

ביום ה' פרשת תזמז"צ, ערב ר"ח אייר, תש"ט
בשעה 9:30 בערב

בבית של ר' ישראל אפרים קופפערשטיין

286 הופער סטריט

ברוקלין, נ. י.

המחכים לקראת בואכם לשלום באהבה רבה

Our wedding invitation.



Our wedding



Tuli and I.



Ervin and I.



Rony as a baby.



Above; Rony receiving his CPIT diploma from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, OHIO.

To the right: Rony receiving his law degree diploma in Columbus, OHIO.

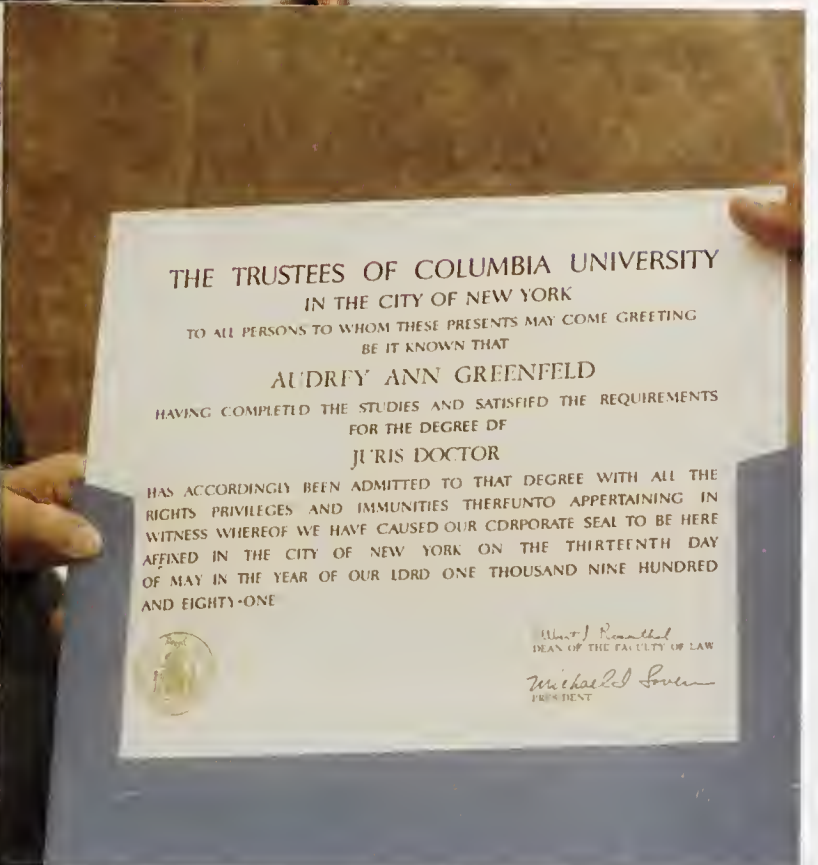




Audrey at six
months old.



Audrey
graduating
from Barnard
College.
New-York.



Audrey graduating from Columbia University law school-New-York

Because of our European accent, our immigrant status never completely disappeared. But, in time we came to be called, and are to this day referred to as "Holocaust Survivors," a somewhat more dignified term. And, in the eyes of others, we will always remain a unique group of people.

So our life was split: "Before and after." Before Auschwitz and after Auschwitz. Even today, when we talk about our memories of our younger years, we use these words: "Before" and "After." And in between those two words stays the shadow of Auschwitz forever.

Fifty years after our liberation, Tuli and I decided to return to Auschwitz. All those years I believed that Auschwitz was a G-d forsaken, uninhabited part of the earth. But we had traveled only a few hours by car from Warsaw, Poland, when we saw on the road-signs that we were coming close to "Oswiecim (Auschwitz, in Polish). I was shocked to see that although we were nearing Auschwitz, we were still passing through small towns and villages. It was a Sunday morning; the church bells were ringing and families with children were going to church just a few kilometers away from the place where once human beings by the hundreds of thousands were tortured beyond description, where our families were gassed and burned. The people in those nearby towns must have known what was going on so close to them! They must have seen the fires and smelled the odor of the burning flesh, carried by the wind. Were those church bells also chiming so peacefully and festively fifty years ago? Were people going to church with their smiling children playfully hopping on the road, while our parents and children were burning in the crematorium? The smell will linger on and the screams of the victims will forever echo over this cursed part of the world, where all that barbarism was committed, so close to civilization.



The ruins of the crematorium in Birkenau.



The Yahrzeit (Memorial) candles Tuli and I lit at the site of the crematorium in 1994.

EPILOGUE

A few years ago, we took our young grandchildren to an "Uncle Moshe" Hanukkah concert. The huge auditorium of a nearby high school was packed with excited, happy little Jewish children, the majority of them grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. It was a triumphant feeling, a great feeling of satisfaction to see the hundreds of children and to listen as they were clapping enthusiastically at "Uncle Moshe's" magic acts. We felt a victory over Hitler, as we heard the children sing Hebrew songs with the performer.

While Hitler's territorial war to realize his dream for Germany "Dauchland uber alles" was crushed on the battlefields by the Allied forces and the Russian army, his carefully planned war against the Jews, with the aim of total annihilation of the Jewish people, was defeated by those of us who by luck survived his inferno. Emerging from the depth of the death camps, we did not waste our energy on revenge, instead we concentrated on rebuilding our shattered lives. We created new families, named our children (and they, their children) after our parents, sisters and brothers, and taught them the traditions of their martyred ancestors. And with that, the determination of Hitler and his collaborators to systematically wipe out the Jewish people and their culture was defeated with the help of the Almighty.



*Celebrating
the Sukkos holiday.
From left to right:
Menachem, Yankov Zev,
Brocha and Tuli.*



*Celebrating
Chanukah,
Aryeh and
Tuli.*



*Tuli teaching
Amanda about
the custom of
kapparos before
Yom Kippur.*

MAGEN
DAVID
ADOM
IN ISRAEL



מגן דוד
אדום
בישראל
HEADQUARTERS

OCT 01 1993

המרכז

1430/93

27 SEPTEMBER 1993

CENTRAL MARYLAND CHAPTER
THE HOLOCAUST AND WAR VICTIMS
TRACING AND INFORMATION CENTER
4700 MOUNT HOPE DRIVE
BALTIMORE, MD 21215-3231

YOUR CASE NO.: ISS-H-31507
NAME OF INQUIRER: AGNES GREEFELD
SOUGHT PERSONS: ALIZ KALLOS GRUNWALD

DEAR COLLEAGUE:

WE WISH TO REFER TO THE ABOVE TRACING REQUEST OF 8 SEPTEMBER 1993.

WE WISH TO ADVISE YOU THAT WE HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN LOCATING MRS.
ALIZ GRUNWALD WHO RESIDES AT: -

PII Redacted

WE ADVISED HER OF THE SEARCH INITIATED BY MRS. GREENFELD AND PROVIDED
HER WITH HER ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NUMBER.

WE ARE PLEASED TO BRING THIS CASE TO SUCH A SWIFT AND HAPPY
CONCLUSION.

WITH BEST WISHES.

SINCERELY YOURS,

A. Barouch

(MRS.) AVIGAIL BAROUCHE
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT

70 YIG'AL ALLON ST., TEL-AVIV 67062, TELEX 371600 MDAHQ IL., TEL.. 6300222 :טל., 67062 תל-אביב, 60 יגאל אלון :פאקס.. 396541 :טקס

*This is the letter from the Magen David Adom
in Israel, in which they notified me that
Aliza-Lici- was living in Netanya, Israel.*

